

PILGRIMAGE

Vol I Pointed Roofs, Backwater, Honeycomb

Vol II The Tunnel, Interim

Vol III Deadlock, Revolving Lights, The Trap

*Vol IV Oberland, Dawn's Left Hand, Clear Horizon,
Dimple Hill*

PILGRIMAGE

By DOROTHY M RICHARDSON

IV

Oberland
Dawn's Left Hand
Clear Horizon
Dimple Hill

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
OBERLAND	9
DAWN'S LEFT HAND	129
CLEAR HORIZON	269
DIMPLE HILL	401

OBERLAND

TO
J H B

CHAPTER I

THE sight of a third porter, this time a gentle-looking man carrying a pile of pillows and coming slowly, filled her with hope. But he passed on his way as heedless as the others. It seemed incredible that not one of these men should answer. She wasted a precious moment seeing again the three brutishly preoccupied forms as figures moving in an evil dream. If only she were without the miserable handbags she might run alongside one of these villains, with a tip in an outstretched hand and buy the simple yes or no that was all she needed. But she could not bring herself to abandon her belongings to the mercy of this ill-mannered wilderness where not a soul would care if she wandered helpless until the undiscovered train had moved off into the night. She knew this would not be, and that what she was resenting was not the human selfishness about her, of which she had her own full share, but this turning of her weariness into exhaustion running the rest of the journey that already had held suffering enough.

There must be several minutes left of the ten the big clock had marked as she neared the platforms. Recalling its friendly face, she saw also that of the little waiter at the buffet who had tried to persuade her to take wine and murmured too late that there was no extra charge for it, very gently. Rallying the remainder of her strength she dropped her things on the platform with a decisiveness she tried just in vain to scorn, and stood still and looked about amongst the hurrying passengers and saw, passing by and going ahead to the movement of an English stride, the familiar, blessed outlines of a Burberry. Ignoring the near train, the man was crossing a pool of lamp-light and making for the dark unlikely platform over the way. She caught up her bags and followed and in a moment was at peace within the semi-darkness of the further platform amongst

people she had seen this morning at Victoria, and the clangorous station was reduced to an enchanting background for confident behaviour

All these people were serene, had come in groups, unscathed, knowing their way, knowing how to quell the bloused fiends into helpfulness. But then, also, the journey to them was uniform grey, a tiresome business to be got through, not black and sudden gold. Yet even they were relieved to find themselves safely through the tangle. They strode unnecessarily about, shouted needlessly to each other, expressing travellers' joy in the English way.

There seemed to be plenty of time, and for a while she strolled delighting in them, until the sight of an excited weary child, in a weatherproof that trailed at its heels, marching sturdily about adream with pride and joy, perfectly caricaturing the rest of the assembly, made her turn away content to see no more, to hoist up her baggage and clamber after it into cover, into the company of her own joy.

Into a compartment whose blinds were snugly drawn upon soft diffused light falling on the elegance of dove-grey repp and white lace that had been the surprise and refreshment of this morning's crowded train, but that now, evening-lit and enclosed, gave the empty carriage the air of a little salon.

Installed here, with fatigue suddenly banished and the large P L M weaving, within the mesh of the lace, its thrilling assurance of being launched on long continental distances, it was easy to forgive the coercion that had imposed the longer sea-route for its cheapness and the first-class ticket for the chance of securing solitude on the night journey.

And indeed this steaming off into the night, that just now had seemed to be the inaccessible goal and end of the journey, was only the beginning of its longest stretch, but demanding merely endurance. With hurry and uncertainty at an end, there could be nothing to compare with what lay behind, nothing that could compare with the state of being a helpless projectile that had spoiled Dieppe and made Paris a nightmare.

Yet Dieppe and Paris and the landscape in between, now that they were set, by this sudden haven, far away in the past,

were already coming before her eyes transformed, lit by the joy that, hovering all the time in the background, had seen and felt France, for whose sake at once she had longed to cease being a hurrying traveller robbed right and left of things passing too swiftly, had been seen Within her now, an irrevocable extension of being, was France

France that had spoken from its coast the moment she came up from the prison of the battened-down saloon, the moment before the shouting fiends charged up the gangway, spoken from the quay, from the lounging blue-bloused figures, the buildings, the way the frontage of the town met the sky and blended with the air, softly, yet clear in its softness, and with serenity that was vivacious, unlike the stolid English peace

And later those slender trees along the high bank of a river, the way they had of sailing by, mannered, *coquettish*, awakening affection for the being of France

And Paris, barely glimpsed and shrouded with the glare of night the emanation even of Paris was peace An emanation as powerful as that of London, more lively and yet more serene Serene where gracious buildings presided over the large flaring thoroughfares, serene even in the dreadful by-streets

And that woman at the station Black-robed figure, coming diagonally across the clear space yellow in gas-light against the background of barriered platforms, seeming with her swift assured gait, bust first, head reared and a little tilted back on the neck, so insolently feminine, and then, as she swept by, suddenly beautiful, from head to foot all gracefully moving rhythm *Style*, of course, redeeming ugliness and cruelty She was the secret of France France concentrated

Michael, staying in Paris, said that the French are indescribably evil and their children like monkeys He had fled eagerly to England But Michael's perceptions are moral France, within his framework, falls back into shadow

The train carrying her through beloved France and away from it to a bourne that had now ceased to be an imagined place, and become an idea, useless, to be lost on arrival as her idea of France had been lost, was so quiet amidst its loud rattling that

the whole of it might be asleep No sound came from the corridor No one passed There was nothing but the continuous rattling and the clatter of gear The world deserting her just when she would have welcomed, for wordless communication of the joy of achievement, the sight and sound of human kind

Twelve hours away, and now only a promise of daylight and of food, lay Berne Beyond Berne, somewhere in the far future of to-morrow afternoon, the terminus, the business of finding and bargaining for a sleigh—the last effort

A muffled figure filled the doorway, entered the carriage, deposited bags A middle-aged Frenchman, dark, with sallow cheeks bulging above a little pointed beard Thinking her asleep, he moved quietly, arranging his belongings with deft, maturely sociable hands From one of them a ring gleamed in the gaslight He showed no sign of relief in escaping into silence, no sign of being alone Conversation radiated from him Where, on the train, could he have been so recently talking that at this moment he was almost making remarks into his bag?

She closed her eyes, listening to his sounds that sent to a distance the sounds of the train He had driven away also the outer spaces The grey and white interior spoke no longer of the strange wide distances of France He was France, at home in a railway carriage, preparing to sleep until, at the end of a definite short space of hours, the Swiss dawn appeared at the windows Before he came the night had stretched ahead, timeless

A moment's stillness, and then a sound like the pumping of nitrous-oxide into a bag She opened her eyes upon him seated opposite with cheeks distended and eyes strained wide above indeed a bag, held to his lips and limply flopping Bracing herself to the presence either of a lunatic or a pitiful invalid believing himself unobserved, she watched while slowly the bag swelled up and took, obedient to an effort that seemed about to make his eyeballs start from his head, the shape of a cushion, circular about a flattened centre Setting it down in the corner corresponding to that where lay her own head, he took off his

boots, pulled on slippers and pattered out into the corridor where he became audible struggling with a near ventilator that presently gave and clattered home. Tiptoeing back into the carriage, where already it seemed that the air grew close, he stood under the light, peering upwards with raised arm. A gentle click, and two little veils slid down over the globe and met, leaving the light quenched to a soft glimmer beautiful, shrouding hard outlines, keeping watch through the night, speaking of night and travel, yet promising day and the end of travel.

But he had not done. He was battling now with the sliding door. It was closing, closed, and the carriage converted into a box almost in darkness and suddenly improper. With a groaning sigh he flung himself down and drew his rug to the margin of the pale disk that was his face and that turned sharply as she rose and passed it to reach the door, and still showed, when the corridor light flowed in through the opened door, a perfect astonishment. His inactivity, while she struggled out with her baggage into the inhospitable corridor, checked the words with which she would have explained her inability to remain sealed for the night in a small box. As she pushed the door to, she thought she heard a sound, a sniggering expletive, mirth at the spectacle of British prudery.

She was alone in the corridor of the sleeping train, in a cold air that reeked of rusting metal and resounded with the clangour of machinery. Exploring in both directions, she found no sign of an attendant, nothing but closely shrouded carriages telling of travellers outstretched and slumbering. Into either of these she felt it impossible to break. There was nothing for it but to abandon the hope of a night's rest and drop to a class whose passengers would be numerous and seated. The train had gathered a speed that flung her from side to side as she went. In two journeys she got her belongings across the metal bridge that swayed above the couplings, and arrived with bruised arms and shoulders in another length of corridor, a duplicate in noise and cold emptiness of the one she had left. Everywhere shrouded carriages. But something had changed, there was something even in the pitiless clangour that seemed to announce a change of class.

The door she pushed open revealed huddled shapes whose dim faces, propped this way and that, were all relaxed in slumber. There was no visible vacant place but, as she hesitated within the emerging reek, a form stirred and sat forward as if to inquire, and when she struggled in with her bags and her apology the carriage came to life in heavily draped movement.

She was seated, shivering in a fog of smells, but at rest, escaped from nightmare voyaging amongst swaying shadows. The familiar world was about her again and she sat blessing the human kindness of these sleeping forms, blessing the man who had first moved, even though his rousing had proved to be anxiety about the open door which, the moment she was inside, he had closed with the gusty blowings of one who takes refuge from a blizzard.

But the sense of home-coming began presently to fade under the pressure of suffering that promised only to increase. She had long ceased to wonder what made it possible for these people to add wraps and rugs to the thick layers of the stifling atmosphere and remain serene. The effort was no longer possible that had carried her through appearances into a sense of the reality beneath. She saw them now as repellent mysteries, pitiless aliens dowered with an unfathomable faculty for dispensing with air. With each breath the smells that had greeted her, no longer separately apparent, advanced in waves whose predominant flavour was the odour of burnt rubber rising from the grating that ran along the middle of the floor and seemed to sear the soles of her feet. Getting beneath them her rolled rug she abandoned all but the sense of survival and sank into herself, into a coma in which everything but the green-veiled oscillating light was motionless forever. Forever the night would go on and her head turn now this way now that against the harsh upholstery.

The train was slowing, stopping. Its rumbling clatter subsided to a prolonged squeak that ended on a stillness within which sounded, one against the other, the rapid ticking of a

watch and a steady rhythmic snore. No one stirred, and for a moment there was nothing but these sounds to witness that life went on. Then faintly, and as if from very far away, she heard the metallic clangours of a large high station and amidst them a thin clarion voice singing out an indistinguishable name. Some large sleeping provincial town signalling its importance, a milestone, marking off hours passed through that need not be braved again. Yet when the train moved on it seemed impossible even to imagine the ending of the night. She had no idea of how long she had sat hemmed and suffering, with nothing in her mind but snatches of song that would not be dismissed, with aching brow and burning eyeballs and a ceaselessly on-coming stupor that would not turn to sleep. And at the next stop, with its echoing clangour and faint clarion voices, she no longer desired somehow to get across the encumbered carriage and taste from a corridor window the sweet fresh air of the railway station so freely breathed by those who were crying in the night.

A numbness had crept into the movement of the train, as though, wearying, it had ceased to clatter and were dropping into a doze. It was moving so quietly that the ticking of the watch again became audible. The wheels under the carriage seemed to be muffled and to labour, pushing heavily forward.

Snow The journey across France ending on the heights along its eastern edge. Her drugged senses awoke bemoaning Paris, gleaming now out of reach far away in the north, challenging with the memory of its glimpsed beauty whatever loveliness might be approaching through the night.

Again outside the stopping train a far-off voice, but this time a jocund sound, ringing echoless in open air. In a moment through a lifted window it became a rousing summons. Blinds went up and, on the huddled forms emerging serene and bright-eyed from their hibernation, a blueish light came in. The opened door admitted crisp sounds close at hand and air, advancing up the carriage.

Upon the platform the air was motionless and yet, walked through, an intensity of movement—movement upon her face of millions of infinitesimal needles, attacking Mountain air 'like wine,' but this effervescence was solid, holding one up, feeding every nerve

A little way down the platform she came upon the luggage, a few trunks set side by side on a counter, and saw at once that her portmanteau was not there. Anxiety dogging her steps. But this air, that reached, it seemed, to her very spirit, would not let her feel anxious.

The movements of the people leaving the train were leisurely, promising a long wait. Most of the passengers were the English set free, strolling happily about in fur-coats and creased Burberrys. English voices took possession of the air. Filled it with the sense of the incorrigible English confidence. And upon a table beyond the counter stood rows and rows of steaming cups. Coffee. *Café, mon Dieu!* Offered casually, the normal beverage of these happy continentals.

The only visible official stood at ease beyond the table answering questions, making no move towards the ranged luggage. He looked very mild, had a little blue-black beard. She thought of long-forgotten Emmerich, the heavy responsible pimpled face of the German official who plunged great hands in amongst her belongings. Perhaps the customs' officers were yet to appear.

Fortified by coffee, she strolled up and made her inquiry in French, but carefully in the slipshod English manner. For a moment her demand seemed to embarrass him. Then, very politely

'Vous arrivez, madame?'

'De Londres.'

'Et vous allez?'

'À Oberland.'

'Vous n'avez qu'à monter dans le train,' and hospitably he indicated the train that stood now emptied, and breathing through its open doors. Walking on down the platform she caught, through a door ajar in the background, a glimpse of a truckle bed with coverings thrown back. Here, as they

laboured forward through the darkness, the douanier had been sleeping, his station ready-staged for their coming, a farcical half-dozen trunks laid out to represent the belongings of the trainful of passengers. Appearances thus kept up, he was enjoying his role of pleasant host. Tant mieux, tant very much mieux. One could enjoy the fun of being let out into the night.

The solid air began to be intensely cold. But in its cold there was no bitterness and it attained only her face, whose shape it seemed to change. And all about the station were steep walls of starless darkness and overhead in a blue-black sky, stars oddly small and numerous; very sharp and near.

When the train moved on, night settled down once more. Once more there was dim gaslight and jolting shadows. But the air was clearer and only two passengers remained, two women, each in her corner and each in a heavy black cloak. Strangers to each other, with the length of the carriage between them, yet alike, indistinguishable; above each cloak a plump middle-aged face not long emerged from sleep: sheened with the sleep that had left the oily, glinting brown eyes. Presently they began to speak, with the freemasonry of women unobserved, socially off duty. Their voices frugal, dull and flat; the voices of those who have forgotten even the desire to find sympathy, to find anything turned their way with an offering.

They reached details. One of them was on her way home to a place with a tripping gentle name, a fairy keep agleam on a lakeside amidst mountains. To her it was dailiness, life as now she knew it, a hemmed-in loneliness. Visitors came from afar. Found it full of poetry. Saw her perhaps as a part of it, a figure of romance.

When their patient voices ceased they were ghosts. Not even ghosts, for they seemed uncreated, seemed never to have lived and yet to preside over life, fixed in their places, an inexorable commentary. Each sat staring before her into space, patient and isolated, undisguised isolation. To imagine them alert and busied with their families about them made them no less sad. Immovable at the centre of their lives was loneliness, its complaints silenced, its source forgotten or unknown.

Of what use traveller's joy? Frivolous, unfounded, dependent altogether on oblivions

One of them was rummaging in a heavy sack made of black twill and corded at the neck Toys, she said, were there—
'*pour mes p'tits enfants*'

'*Ça porte beaucoup de soins, les enfants,*' said the other, and compressed dry lips The first agreed and they sat back, each in her corner, fallen into silence Children, to them, seemed to be not persons but a material, an unvarying substance wearily known to them both and to be handled in that deft adjusting way of the French Satisfied with this mutual judgment on life, made in camera, they relapsed into contemplation, leaving the air weighted with their shared, secretly scornful, secretly impatient resignation

Yet they were fortunate Laden with wealth they did not count It spoke in their complacency Aspiration asleep They looked for joy in the wrong place In this they were humanity, blindly pursuing its way Their pallid plump faces, so salient, could smile impersonally Their heads were well-poised above shapely, subdued bodies

Now that it was empty and the blinds drawn up, the carriage seemed all window, letting in the Swiss morning that was mist opening here and there upon snow still greyed by dawn Through the one she had just pushed up came life, smoothing away the traces of the night She lay back in her corner and heard with closed eyes the steady voice of the train The rattle and clatter of its night-long rush through France seemed to be checked by a sense of achievement, as if now it took its ease, delighting in the coming of day, in the presence of this Switzerland for whose features it was watching through the mist

Incredible that in this same carriage where now she was at peace in morning light she had sat through a flaming darkness, penned and enduring Lifting weary eyes she boldly surveyed it, saw the soiled and shabbiness the gaslight had screened, saw

a friend, grimed with beneficent toil, and turned once more blissfully towards the window and its view of thin mist and dawn-greyed snow-fields

The leap of recognition, unknowing between the mountains and herself which was which, made the first sight of them—smooth snow and crinkled rock in unheard-of unimagined tawny light—seem, even at the moment of seeing, already long ago

They knew, they smiled joyfully at the glad shock they were, sideways gigantically advancing while she passed as over a bridge across which presently there would be no return, seeing and unseeing, seeing again with the first keen vision

They closed in upon the train, summitless, their bases gliding by, a ceaseless tawny cliff throwing its light into the carriage, almost within touch, receding, making space at its side for sudden blue water, a river accompanying, giving them gentleness who were its mighty edge, broadening, broadening, becoming a wide lake, a stretch of smooth peerless blue with mountains reduced and distant upon its hither side With the sideways climbing of the train the lake dropped away, down and down until presently she stood up to see it below in the distance, a blue pool amidst its encirclement of mountain and of sky a picture sliding away, soundlessly, hopelessly demanding its perfect word

'Je suis anglaise,' she murmured as the window came down into place

'Je le crois, madame Mais comment-voulez-vous-mon-dieu-vous-autres-anglais-qu'on-chauffe-les-coupés?'

She was left to pictures framed and glazed

Berne was a snowstorm blotting out everything but small white green-shuttered houses standing at angles about the open

space between the station and the little restaurant across the way, their strangeness veiled by falling flakes, flakes falling fast on freshly fallen snow that was pitted with large deep-sunken foot-prints. The electric air of dawn had softened, and as she plunged, following the strides of a row of foot-prints, across to her refuge, it wrapped her about, a pleasant enlivening density, warmed by the snow. Monstrous snowstorm, adventure, and an excuse for shirking the walk to the Bridge and its view of the Bernese heights. She was not ready for heights. This little secret tour, restricted to getting from train to breakfast and back again to the train, gave her, with its charm of familiar activity in a strange place, a sharp first sense of Switzerland that in obediently following the dictated programme she would have missed. But coming forth, strengthened, once more into the snow she regretted the low walking-shoes that prevented the following up of her glad meeting with the forgotten details of the continental breakfast, its tender-crusts, rolls, the small oblongs of unlistening sugar that sweetened the life-giving coffee, by an exploration of the nearer streets.

Presently their talk fell away and the journeying cast again its full spell. Almost soundlessly the train was labouring along beside a ridge that seemed to be the silent top of the world gliding by, its narrow strip of grey snow-thick sky pierced by the tops of the crooked stakes that were a fence submerged. From time to time the faint clear sound of a bell, ting-ting, and a neat toy station slid by, half buried in snow.

'I don't dislike those kind of breakfasts myself,' she said and turned her face to the window. Her well-cut lips had closed unpressing, flowerlike. Both the girls had the slender delicate fragility of flowers. And strength. Refined and gentle, above a strength of which they were unaware. They were immensely strong or they would not appear undisturbed by their long journeying, would not look so exactly as if they were returning

home in an omnibus from an afternoon's shopping in their own Croydon

They had come so far together that it would seem churlish, with the little terminus welcoming the whole party, to turn away from them. And she liked them, was attached to them as fellow adventurers, fellow survivors of the journey. The falling into the trap of travellers' freemasonry was inevitable: a fatal desire to know the whence and the whither and, before you are aware, you have pooled your enterprise and the new reality is at a distance. But so far it had not come to that. There were no adieux. They had melted away, they and their things, lost in the open while she, forgetful of everything but the blessed cessation, had got herself out of the train.

The station was in a wilderness. High surrounding mountains making it seem that their half-day's going up and still up had brought them out upon a modest lowland. There was no sign from where she stood of any upward track. Sheds, dumped upon a waste of snow beyond which mountains filled the sky and barred the way.

Fierce-looking men in blue gaberdines and slouch hats, lounging about. One of these must be attacked and bargained with for a sleigh. But there were no sleighs to be seen, nothing at all resembling a vehicle, unless indeed one braved the heights in one of those rough shallow frameworks on runners, some piled with hay and some with peeled yellow timbers, neatly lashed. Perhaps a sleigh should be ordered in advance? Perhaps here she met disaster.

The man knew her requirements before she spoke and was all hot-eyed eagerness, yet off-hand. Brutish, yet making her phrases, that a London cabby would have received with deference, sound discourteous. In his queer German he agreed to the smaller sum and turned away to expectorate.

The large barn-like restaurant was empty save for a group of people at the far end, forgotten again and again as she sat too happy to swoop the immense distance between herself and

anything but the warm brownness of the interior and its strange quality, its intensity of welcoming shelter—sharp contrast with the bleak surrounding snow. Switzerland was here, already surrounding and protecting with an easy practised hand. And there was a generous savouriness. She could not recall any lunching on an English journey affording this careless completeness of comfort.

Incompletely sharing these appreciations, her tired and fevered body cowered within the folds of the beneficent fur-coat seeking a somnolence that refused to possess it. Fever kept her mind alert, but circling at a great pace round and round amidst reiterated assertions. Turn and turn about they presented themselves, were flung aside in favour of what waited beyond, and again thrust themselves forward, as if determined, so emphatic they were, not only to share but to steer her adventure. And away behind them, standing still and now forever accessible, were the worlds she had passed through since the sleet drove in her face at Newhaven. And ahead unknown Oberland, summoning her up amongst its peaks.

Hovering vehement above them all, hung the cloud of her pity for those who had never bathed in strangeness—and its dark lining, the selfish congratulation that reminded her how at the beginning of her life, in the face of obstructions, she had so bathed and now under kindly compulsion was again bathing. And again alone. Loneliness, that had long gone from her life, had come back for this sudden voyaging to be her best companion, to shelter strangeness that can be known only in solitude.

In a swift glimpse, caught through the mesh woven by the obstinate circlings of her consciousness, she saw her time in Germany, how perfect in pain and joy, how left complete and bright had been that piece of her life. And in Belgium—in spite of the large party. Yet even the party, though they had taken the edge from many things, had now become a rich part of the whole. But the things that came back most sharply had been seen in solitude. In those times of going out alone on small commissions, the way the long vista of boulevard seemed to sing for joy, the sharp turn, the clean pavé and neat bright little

shops, the charcuterie just round the corner, the old pharmacien who had understood and quickly and gravely chloroformed the kitten quite dead, the long walk through the grilling lively Brussels streets to get the circular tickets—little shadow over it of pain at the thought of the frightened man who believed it sinful to go to mass and saw the dull little English Church as light in a pagan darkness, the afternoon alone in the polished old salon while the others were packing for the Ardennes tour, just before the great thunderstorm, bright darkness making everything gleam, the candles melting in the heavy heat, drooping from their sconces, white, and gracious in their oddity, against the dark panelling rich ancient gloom and gleam and the certainty of the good of mass, of the way, so welcome and so right as an interval in living, it stayed the talkative brain and made the soul sure of itself. That moment in Bruges—after the wrangling at the station, after not wanting to go deliberately to see the Belfry, after feeling forever blank in just this place that was fulfilling all the so different other places, showing itself to be their centre and secret, while aunt Bella bought the prawns and we all stood fuming in the sweltering heat—of being suddenly struck alive, drawn running away from them all down the little brown street—the Belfry and its shadow, all its might and sweetness and surroundedness, safe, before they all came up with their voices and their books.

And oh! that first glimpse that had begun it all, of Brussels in the twilight from the landing window, old peaked houses, grouped irregularly and rising out of greenery, gothic, bringing happy nostalgia. Gothic effects bring nostalgia, have a deep recognizable quality of life. A gothic house is a person, a square house is a thing.

In silence and alone, yet most people prefer to see everything in groups, collectively. They never lose themselves in strangeness and wake changed.

That man is cheerfully bearing burdens. Usually in a party there is one who is alone. Harassed, yet quietly seeing.

He was smiling, the smile of an old friend. With a sharp effort she pushed her way through, wondering how long she had sat staring at them, to recognition of the Croydon party.

Who else indeed could it be? She gathered herself together and instantly saw in the hidden future not the sunlit mountains of her desire but, for the first time, the people already ensconced at the Alpenstock, demanding awareness and at least the semblance of interest. Sports-people, not only to the manner born—that, though they would not know it, was a tie, a home-tie pulling at her heart—but to the manner dressed, making one feel not merely inadequate but improperly hard-up. But since she was to rest on a balcony? And there was the borrowed fur-coat and the blue gown.

The words sung out by the Croydon father were lost amongst their echoes in the rafters. She heard only the English voice come, as she had come, so far and so laboriously. Her gladly answering words were drowned by the sudden jingling of sleigh-bells at the door near by.

Behind the sturdy horse, whose head-tossings caused the silvery clash of bells, was the sleigh of *The Polish Jew*, brought out of the darkness at the back of the stage and brightly coloured upon a background of pillar-box red, flourishing gilt scrolls surrounded little landscape scenes painted upon its sides in brilliant deep tones that seemed to spread a warmth and call attention to the warmth within the little carriage sitting compact and low on its runners and billowing with a large fur rug.

As unexpected as the luxurious vehicle was the changed aspect of the driver. Still wearing smock and slouch hat he had now an air of gravity, the air of a young student of theology. And on his face, as he put her into the sleigh, a look of patient responsibility. He packed and arranged with the manner of one handling valuables, silently, the Swiss manner, perhaps, of treating the English, acquired and handed down through long experience of the lavish generosity of these travellers from whom it was useless to expect an intelligible word. But there was contempt too, deep-rooted, patient contempt.

This was luxury. There was warmth under her feet, fur lining upon the back of the seat reinforced by the thickness of

the fur-coat, and all about her the immense fur rug. There was nothing to fear from the air that presently would be in movement, driving by and growing colder as the sleigh went up into the unknown heights. Away ahead, the Croydon party made a compact black mass between the two horses of their larger sleigh and the luggage, standing out behind in unwieldy cubes just above the snow. Their driver was preparing to start. On all the upward way they would be visible ahead, stealing its mystery, heralding the hotel at the end.

They were off, gliding swiftly over the snow, gay voices mingling with the sound of bells, silvery crashings going to the rhythm of a soundless trit-trot. Every moment her own horse threw up a spray of tinkles, promising the fairy crashing that would ring upon the air against the one now rapidly receding. The mountains frowning under the grey sky and the snowfields beyond the flattened expanse round the station came to life listening to the confidently receding bells.

The Croydon party disappeared round a bend and again there was silence and a mighty inattention. But her man, come round from lashing on her luggage, was getting into his seat just as he was, coatless and gathering up the reins with bare hands.

‘Euh!’

The small sound, like a word spoken *sotto voce* to a neighbour, barely broke the stillness, but the sleigh leapt to the pull of the horse, and glided smoothly off. Its movement was pure enchantment. No driving on earth could compare to this skimming along on hard snow to the note of the bells that was higher than that of those gone on ahead and seemed to challenge them with an overtaking eagerness. Gay and silvery sweet, it seemed to make a sunlight within the sunless air and to call up to the crinkled tops of the mountains that were now so magnificently in movement.

‘Euh-euh!’

On they swept through the solidly impinging air. Again the million needles attacking. In a moment they were round the bend and in sight of the large sleigh, a moving patch upon the rising road.

'Euh-euh-euh,' urged the driver laconically, and the little sleigh flew rocking up the slight incline. They were overtaking. The heavier note of the bells ahead joined its slower rhythm to their swift light jinglings. The dark mass of the Croydon party showed four white faces turned to watch.

'You are well off with your fur-coat,' cried the father as her sleigh skimmed by. They had looked a little crouched and enduring. Not knowing the cold she had endured in the past, cold that lay ahead to be endured again, in winters set in a row.

Ringling in her head as she sped upwards along the road narrowing and flanked by massive slopes whose summits had drawn too near to be seen, were the shouted remarks exchanged by the drivers. They had fallen resonantly upon the air and opened within it a vision of the sunlit heights known to these men with the rich deep voices. But there was the hotel.

After all, no one was to witness her apprenticeship. And to get up within sight of the summits was worth much suffering. Suffering that would be forgotten. And if these were Oberland men, then there was to be *ski-running* to-morrow. Si-renna, what else could that mean? Patois, rich and soft. Doomed to die. Other words gathered unawares on the way came and placed themselves beside those ringling in her ears. Terminations, turns of sound, upon a new quality of voice. Strong and deep and ringling with a wisdom that brought her a sense of helpless ignorance. The helpless ignorance of town culture.

The thin, penetrating mist promised increasing cold. The driver flung on a cloak, secured at the neck but falling open across his chest and leaving exposed his thinly clad arms and bare hands.

She pulled high the collar of her fur-coat, rimy now at its edges, and her chin ceased to ache and only her eyes and cheekbones felt the thin icy attacking mist that had appeared so suddenly. The cold of a few moments ago, numbing her face, had brought a hint of how one might freeze quietly to death, numbed and as if warmed by an intensity of cold, and that out

amongst the mountains it would not be terrible But this raw mist bringing pain in every bone it touched would send one aching to one's death, crushed to death by a biting increasing pain

She felt elaborately warm, not caring even now how long might go on this swift progress along a track that still wound through corridors of mountains and still found mountains rising ahead But night would come, and the great shapes all about her would be wrapped away until they were a darkness in the sky

If this greying light were the fall of day then certainly the cold would increase She tried to reckon how far she had travelled eastwards, by how much earlier the sun would set But south, too, she had come

The mist was breaking, being broken from above It dawned upon her that they had been passing impossibly through clouds and were now reaching their fringe Colour was coming from above, was already here in dark brilliance, thundery Turning to look down the track she saw distance, cloud masses, light-soaked and gleaming

And now from just ahead, high in the mist, a sunlit peak looked down

Long after she had sat erect from her warm ensconcement, the sunlit mountain corridors still seemed to be saying watch, see, if you can believe it, what we can do And all the time it seemed that they must open out and leave her upon the hither side of enchantment, and still they turned and brought fresh vistas Sungilt masses beetling variously up into pinnacles that truly cut the sky, high up beyond their high-clambering pinewoods, where their snow was broken by patches of tawny crag She still longed to glide forever onwards through this gladness of light

But the bright gold was withdrawing Presently it stood only upon the higher ridges The colour was going and the angular shadows, leaving a bleakness of white, leaving the mountains higher in their whiteness The highest sloped more

swiftly than the others from its lower mass and ended in a long cone of purest white with a flattened top sharply aslant against the deepening blue, as if walking up it. It held her eyes, its solid thickness of snow, the way from its blunted tower it came broadening down unbroken by crag, radiant white until, far down, its pinewoods made a gentleness about its base. Up there on the quiet of its top-most angle it seemed there must be someone, minutely rejoicing in its line along the sky.

A turn brought peaks whose gold had turned to rose. She had not eyes enough for seeing. Seeing was not enough. There was sound, if only one could hear it, in this still, signalling light.

The last of it was ruby gathered departing upon the topmost crags, seeming, the moment before it left them, to be deeply wrought into the crinkled rock.

At a sharp bend, the face of the sideways-lounging driver came into sight, expressionless.

'*Schon, die letzte Gluh,*' he said quietly.

When she had pronounced her '*Wunderschon,*' she sat back released from intentness, seeing the scene as one who saw it daily, and noticed then that the colour ebbed from the mountains had melted into the sky. It was this marvel of colour, turning the sky to molten rainbow, that the driver had meant as well as the rubied ridges that had kept the sky forgotten.

Just above a collar of snow, that dipped steeply between the peaks it linked, the sky was a soft greenish purple paling upwards from mauve-green to green whose edges melted imperceptibly into the deepening blue. In a moment they were turned towards the opposite sky, bold in smoky russet rising to amber and to saffron-rose expanding upwards, a high radiant background for its mountain, spread like a banner, not pressed dense and close with deeps strangely moving, like the little sky above the collar.

The mountain lights were happiness possessed, sure of recurrence. But these skies, never to return, begged for remembrance.

The dry cold deepened, bringing sleep. Drunk, she felt now, with sleep, dizzy with gazing, and still there was no sign

of the end They were climbing a narrow track between a smooth high drift, a greying wall of snow, and a precipice sharply falling

An opening, the floor of a wide valley Mountains hemming it, exposed from base to summit, moving by as the sleigh sped along the level to where a fenced road led upwards Up this steep road they went in a slow zigzag that brought the mountains across the way now right now left, and a glimpse ahead, against the sky of a village, angles and peaks of low buildings sharply etched, quenched by snow, crushed between snow and snow, and in their midst the high snow-shrouded cone of a little church, Swiss village, lost in wastes of snow

At a tremendous pace they jingled along a narrow street of shops and chalets The street presently opened to a circle about the little church and narrowed again and ended, showing beyond, as the sleigh pulled up at the steps of a portico, rising ground and the beginning of pinewoods

CHAPTER II

SHE followed the little servant, who had darted forth to seize her baggage, into a small lounge whose baking warmth recalled the worst of the train journey, seeming—though, since still one breathed, air was there—like an over-heated vacuum

The brisk little maid, untroubled, was already at the top of a short flight of wide red-carpeted stairs, and making impatient rallying sounds—like one recalling a straying dog. Miriam went gladly to the promise of the upper air. But in going upwards there was no relief

Glancing, as she passed at the turn of the stairs, at a figure standing in a darkness made by the twilight in the angle of the wall, she found the proprietress receiving her, a thick rigid figure in a clumsy black dress, silent, and with deep-set glinting eyes, hostile and suspicious, stirring a memory of other eyes gazing out like this upon the world, of peasant women at cottage doors in German villages, peering out with evil eyes, but from worn and kindly faces. There was nothing kindly about this woman, and her commonness was almost startling, dreary and meagre and seeming to be of the spirit

She blamed for the unmitigated impression the fatigue she was silently pleading whilst she searched for the mislaid German phrases in which to explain that she had chosen the cheaper room. She found only the woman's name. Knigge. This was Frau Knigge, at once seeming more human, and obviously waiting for her to speak

Suddenly, and still unbending from her rigid pose, she made statements in slow rasping English and a flat voice, that came unwillingly and told of vanished interest in life. Life, as she spoke, looked terrible that could make a being so crafty and so cold, that could show to any one on earth as it showed to this woman

Admitting her identity, seeing herself as she was being seen, Miriam begged for her room, hurrying through her words to

hide the thoughts that still they seemed to reveal, and that were changing, as she heard the sound of her own voice, dreadfully, not to consideration for one whose lot had perhaps been too hard to bear, but to a sudden resentment of parleying, in her character as Roman citizen, with this peasant whose remoteness of being was so embarrassing her

The woman's face lit up with an answering resentment and a mocking contempt for her fluent German. Too late she realized that Roman citizens do not speak German. But the details were settled, the interview was at an end, and the woman's annoyance due perhaps only to the choice of the cheaper room. When she turned to shout instructions to the maid, she became humanity, in movement, moving in twilight that for her too was going on its way towards the light of to-morrow.

When the door was at last blessedly closed upon the narrow room whose first statements miscarried, lost in the discovery that even up here there was no change in the baked dry air, she made for the cool light of the end window but found in its neighbourhood not only no lessening but an increase of the oppressive warmth.

The window was a door giving on to a little balcony whose wooden paling hid the floor of the valley and the bases of the great mountains across the way. The mountains were now bleak white, patched and streaked with black, and as she stood still, gazing at them set there arrested and motionless and holding before her eyes an unthinkable grey bitterness of cold, she found a new quality in her fast closed windows and the exaggerated warmth. Though still oppressive they were triumphant also, speaking a knowledge and a defiance of the uttermost possibilities of cold.

Cold was banished, by day and by night. For a fortnight, taken from the rawest depths of the London winter, there would be no waste of life in mere endurance.

She discovered the source of the stable warmth in an unsightly row of pipes at the side of the large window, bent over like hairpins and scorching to the touch. The concentrated heat revived her weary nerves. At the end of the coil there was

a regulator Turning it she found the heat of the pipes diminish and hurriedly reversed the movement and glanced out at the frozen world and loved the staunch metallic warmth and the flavour of timber added to it in this room whose walls and furniture were all of naked wood

Turning to it in greeting she found it seem less small It was small, but made spacious by light Light came from a second window that was now calling—a small square beside the bed with the high astonishing smooth billow of covering oddly encased in thin sprigged cotton—offering mountains not yet seen

The way to it was endless across the short room from whose four quarters there streamed, as she moved, a joy so deep that she brought up opposite the window as if on another day of life, and glanced out carelessly at a distant group of pinnacles darkening in a twilight that was not grey but lit wanly in its fading, by snow

The little servant came in with the promised tea and made, as she set it upon the little table with the red and white check cover of remembered German cafés, bent over it in her short-skirted check dress and squab of sleek flaxen hair, a picture altogether German She answered questions gravely, responsibility speaking even in the smile that shone from her plump toil-sheened young face, telling the story of how she and her like, permanently toiling, were the price of happiness for visitors But this she did not know She was happy Liked being busy and smiling and being smiled at and shutting the door very carefully

Some movements of hers had set swinging an electric bulb hanging by a cord above the little table Over the head of the bed there was another Light and warmth in profusion—in a cheap room in a modest hotel

Switching on the light that concentrated on the table and its loaded little tray and transformed the room to a sitting-room, 'I'm in Switzerland,' she said aloud to the flowered earthenware and bright nickel, and sat down to revel in freedom and renewal and at once got up again realizing that hurry had gone from her days, and flung off her blouse and found hot water

set waiting on the washstand and was presently at the table in *négligé* and again ecstatically telling it her news

The familiar sound of tea pouring into a cup heightened the surrounding strangeness. In the stillness of the room it was like a voice announcing her installation, and immediately from downstairs there came as if in answer the sound of a piano, crisply and gently touched, seeming not so much to break the stillness as to reveal what lay within it

She set down her teapot and listened, and for a moment could have believed that the theme was playing itself only in her mind, that it had come back to her because once again she was within the strange happiness of being abroad. Through all the years she had tried in vain to recall it, and now it came, to welcome her, piling joy on joy, setting its seal upon the days ahead and taking her back to her Germany where life had been lived to music that had flowed over its miseries and made its happinesses hardly to be borne

For an instant she was back in it, passing swiftly from scene to scene of the months in Waldstrasse and coming to rest in a summer's evening warm light upon the garden, twilight in the *saal*. Leaving it, she turned to the other scenes, freshly revived, faithfully fulfilling their remembered promise to endure in her for ever, but each one, as she paused in it, changed to the summer's evening she had watched from the darkening *saal*, the light upon the little high-walled garden, making space and distance with the different ways it fell on trees and grass and clustering shrubs, falling full on the hushed group of girls turned towards it with Fraulein Pfaff in their midst disarmed to equality by the surrounding beauty, making a little darkness in the summer-house where Solomon shone in her white dress. And going back to it now it seemed as though some part of her must have lived continuously there, so that she was everywhere at once, in *saal* and garden and summer-house and out, beyond the enclosing walls, in the light along the spacious forbidden streets.

She relived the first moment of knowing gladly and without feeling of disloyalty how far a *Sommerabend* outdoes a summer's evening, how the evening beauty was intensified by the deeps of poetry in the Germans all about her, and remembered

her fear lest one of the English should sound an English voice and break the spell And how presently Clara Bergmann, unasked, had retreated into the shadowy saal and played this ballade and in just this way, the way of slipping it into the stillness

'Man soll sich des Lebens freuen, im Berg und Thal In so was kann sich ein' Engländerin nie hineinleben'

Perhaps not, but in that small group of English there had been two who would in spite of homesickness have given anything just to go on, on any terms, existing in Germany

It is their joy, the joyful rich depth of life in them

And this ballade was joy Eternal Sommerabend, and now, to-morrow's Swiss sunlight Someone there was downstairs to whom it was a known and cherished thing, who was perhaps wise about it, wise in music and able to place it in relation to other compositions

Its charm she now saw, coming to it afresh and with a deepened recognition, lay partly in the way it opened not beginning, but continuing something gone before It was a shape of tones caught from a pattern woven continuously and drawn, with its rhythm ready set, gleaming into sight The way of the best nocturnes But with nothing of their pensiveness It danced in the sky and tiptoed back to earth down the group of little chords that filled the pause, again sprang forth and up and came wreathing down to touch deep lower tones who flung it to and fro Up again until once more upon down-stepping chords it came into the rhythm of its dance

It was being played from memory, imperfectly, by someone who had the whole clear within him and, in slowing up for the complicated passages, never stumbled or lost the rhythm or ceased to listen Someone choosing just this fragment of all the music in the world to express his state joy in being up here in snow and sunlight

When the gown was on, the creasing was more evident, all but the enlivening strange harmony of embroidered blues and greens and mauves was a criss-cross of sharp lines and shadows

For the second time the long loud buzzing of the downstairs bell vibrated its summons through the house

Standing once more before the little mirror that reflected only her head and shoulders she re-created the gown in its perfection of cut, the soft depths of its material that hung and took the light so beautifully

'Your first Switzerland must be good I want your first Switzerland to be good' And then, in place of illuminating hints, that little diagram on the table of life as a zigzag Saddening Perhaps he was right Then, since the beginning had been so good, all a sharp zig, what now waited downstairs, heralded by the creased dress, was a zag, equally sharp

The dining-room, low-ceiled and oblong, was large and seemed almost empty Small tables set away towards a window on the right and only one of them occupied, left clear the large space of floor between the door at which she had come in and a table, filling the length of the far side of the room where beside a gap in the row of diners a servant stood turned towards her with outstretched indicating hand

No one but the servant had noticed her entry Voices were sounding, smooth easy tones leaving the air composed, as she slipped into her place in a light that beside the unscreened glare upstairs was mellow, subdued by shades The voices were a man's across the way—light and kindly, 'varsity, the smiling tone of one who is amiable even in disagreement—and that of the woman on her left, a subdued deep bass Other voices dropped in, as suave and easy, and clipping and slurring their words in the same way, but rather less poised

The tone of these people was balm Sitting with eyes cast down, aware only of the subdued golden light, she recalled her fleeting glimpse of them as she had crossed the room, English in daily evening dress, and was carried back to the little world of Newlands where first she had daily shared the evening festival of diners dressed and suave about a table free of dishes, set with flowers and elegancies beneath a clear and softly shaded light the world she had sworn never to leave She remembered a summer morning, the brightness of the light over her breakfast tray and its unopened letters and her vow to remain always

surrounded by beauty, always with flowers and fine fabrics, and space and a fresh clean air close about her, playing their part that was so powerful

And this little wooden Swiss hotel with its baked air and philistine fittings was to provide, thrown in with Switzerland, more than a continuation of Newlands—Newlands seen afresh with experienced eyes

The clipped, slurred words had no longer the charm of a foreign tongue. Though still they rang upon the air the pre-occupations of the man at the wheel the sound of 'The Services,' adapted. But clustered in this small space they seemed to be bringing with them another account of their origin, to be showing how they might come about of themselves and vary from group to group, from person to person—with one aim to avoid disturbing the repose of the features. Expression might be animated or inanimate, but features must remain undisturbed.

Then there is no place for clearly enunciated speech, apart from oratory, platform and pulpit. Anywhere else it is bad form. Bad fawm.

She felt she knew now why perfect speech, delightful in itself, always seemed insincere. Why women with clear musical voices, undulating, and clean enunciation, are always cats, and the corresponding men, ingratiating and charming at first, turn out sooner or later to be charlatans.

The nicest people have bad handwriting and bad delivery.

But all this applied only to English, to Germanics, that was a queer exciting thing, that only these languages had the quality of aggressive disturbance of the speaking face—chin-jerking vowels and aspirates, throat-swelling gutturals—force and strength and richness, qualities innumerable and more various than in any other language.

Quelling an impulse to gaze at the speakers lit by discovery, she gazed instead at imagined faces, representative Englishmen, with eyes and brows serene above rapid slipshod speech.

Here, too, of course, was the explanation of the other spontaneous forms of garbling, the extraordinary pulpit speech of self-conscious and incompletely believing parsons, and the mincing speech of the genteel. It explained 'nace' Nice,

correctly spoken, is a convulsion of the lower face—like a dog snapping at a gnat

She had a sudden vision of the English aspirate, all over the world, puff-puff-puffing like a steam-engine, and was wondering whether it were a waste or a source of energy, when she became acutely aware of being for those about her a fresh item in their grouping

It was a burden too heavy to be borne The good Swiss soup had turned her bright fever of fatigue to a drowsiness that made every effort to sit decently upright end in a renewed abject drooping that if only she were alone could be the happy drooping of convalescence from the journey

Their talk had gone on It was certain that always they would talk Archipelagos of talk, avoiding anything that could endanger continuous urbanity

In the midst of a stifled yawn, the call to a fortnight's continuous urbanity fell upon her like a whip Dodging the blow, she lolled resistant to the sound of bland voices An onlooker, appreciative but resistant, that, socially, would be the story of her stay A docile excursion, even if they should offer it, into this select little world, would come between her and her Switzerland Refusal clamoured within her and it was only as an afterthought that she realized the impossibility of remaining for a fortnight without opinions

The next moment, hearing again the interwoven voices as a far-off unison of people sailing secure on smooth accustomed waters, she was bleakly lonely, suppliant Nothing showed ahead but a return with her fatigue to sustain the silence and emptiness of a strange room She was about to glance at the woman on her left when the deep bass voice asked her casually if she had had a good journey Casual camaraderie, as if already they had been talking and were now hiding an established relationship under conventionalities

The moment she had answered she heard the university voice across the way remark, in the tone of one exchanging notes with a friend after a day's absence, that it was a vile journey, but all right from Berne onwards, and looked up There he was, almost opposite, Cambridge, and either history

or classics, the pleasant radiance of *Lit Hum* all about him, and turned her way bent a little, as if bowing, and as if waiting for her acknowledgment—with his smile, apology, introduction and greeting beaming together from sea-blue eyes set only ever so little too closely together in a neatly tanned narrowly oval face—before regaining the upright

Her soft reply, lost in other sounds, made a long moment during which, undisturbed by not hearing, he held his attitude of listening that told her he was glad of her presence

The close-set eyes meant neither weakness nor deceit. Sec-tarian eyes, emancipated. But his strength was borrowed. His mental strength was not original. An uninteresting mind, also he was a little selfish, with the selfishness of the bachelor of thirty—but charming

The party was smaller than she had thought. The odd way they were all drawn up at one end of the table made them look numerous. Spread out in the English way they would have made a solemn dinner-party, with large cold gaps

Someone asked whether she had come right through, and in a moment they were all amiably wrangling over the pros and cons of breaking the journey

Staring from across the table was a man alone, big oblong foreigner dwarfing his neighbours, and piteous, not to be looked at as the others could who fitted the scene, not so much sitting at table with the rest as set there filling a space. His eyes had turned towards a nasal voice suddenly prevailing, sombre brown, wistfully sulking below eyebrows lifted in a wide forehead that stopped unexpectedly soon at a straight fence of hair. Oblong beard reaching the top of stiff brown coat. Russian, probably the Chopin player

'Any one's a fool who passes Parrus without stopping off at least a few hours'

A small man at the end of the row, opaque blue eyes in a peaky face, little peaked beard, neat close-fitting dress clothes. Incongruous far-travelled guest of little Switzerland

He was next the window, with the nice man on his right. Then came the big Russian exactly opposite, and again naively staring across, and beyond him a tall lady in a home-made silk

blouse united by a fichu to the beginning of a dark skirt, coronet of soft, coiled white hair above a firmly padded face with polished skin, pink-flushed, glimmering into the talk, that was now a debate about to-morrow's chances, into which sounded women's voices from the table behind, smooth and clear, but clipped, freemasonish like the others. To the right of the coronetted lady an iron-grey man, her husband, gaunt and worn, with peevishly suffering eyes set towards the door on the far side of the room. Fastidious eyes, full of knowledge, turned away. He was the last in the row and beyond him the table stretched away to the end wall through whose door the servants came and went. His opponents were out of sight beyond the bass-voiced woman on the left, whose effect was so strangely large and small—a face horse-like and delicate and, below her length of face increased by the pyramid of hair above her pointed fringe, a meeting of old lace and good jewellery.

To her own right, the firm insensitive hand, that wore a signet ring and made pellets of its bread, belonged to just the man she had imagined, dark and liverish, but with an unexpectedly flattened profile whose moustache, dropping to sharp points, gave it an expression faintly Chinese, a man domestic but accustomed to expand in unrestricted statement, impatiently in leash to the surrounding equality of exchange. Beyond him his wife, sitting rather eagerly forward, fair and plump, with features grown expressionless in their long service of holding back her thoughts, but, betraying their secret in a brow, creased faintly by straining upwards as if in perpetual incredulity of an ever-present spectacle, and become now the open page of the story the mouth and eyes were not allowed to tell.

At her side a further figure and beyond it the head of the table, unoccupied, leaving the party to be its own host.

The atmosphere incommoding the husband, who at a second glance seemed to call even pathetically for articulate opposition, was that of a successful house-party, its tone set by the only two in sight who were through and through of the authentic brand—the deep-voiced woman and the nice man. The invalid and his wife belonged to that inner circle. But they were a little shadowed by his malady.

It was an atmosphere in which the American and the Russian were ill at ease, one an impatient watchfulness for simpler, more lively behaviour and the other a bored detachment, heavily anchored, not so much by thoughts as by hard clear images left by things seen according to the current formula of whatever group of the European intelligentsia he belonged to

He was speaking softly through the general conversation to the nice man, with slight deprecating gestures of eyebrows and shoulders, in his eyes a qualified gratitude. The nice man spoke carefully with head turned and bent, seeking his words French, with English intonation. All these people, however fluently, would talk like that. All of them came from a world that counted mastery of a foreign tongue both wonderful and admirable—but ever so little *infra dig*

‘Won’t you come in heah for a bit?’

Drugged as she felt with weariness, she turned joyfully into a room opening in the background of the hall whence the deep bass voice had sounded as she passed. A tiny salon, ugly, maroon and buff in a thick light. Plush sofa, plush cover on the round table in the centre, stiff buff-seated ‘drawing-room’ chairs, a piano. It was from this dismal little room the Chopin had sounded out into the twilight.

There she was, alone, standing very thin and tall in a good, rather drearily elderly black dress beside a cheerless radiator, one elbow resting on its rim and a slender foot held towards it from beneath the hem of a slightly hitched skirt—an English-woman at a fireside.

‘My name’s Harcourt, M’zz Harcourt,’ she said at once.

Books were set star-wise in small graded piles about the centre of the table, the uppermost carrying upon their covers scrolls and garlands of untarnished gilt. The one she opened revealed short-lined poems set within yet more garlands, appealing, leaves and buds and birds lively and sweet about the jingling verse. Swiss joy in deep quiet valleys guarded by

sunlit mountains Joy of people living in beauty all their lives, enclosed Yet making rooms like this

But it held the woman at the radiator, knowing England and her sea, and whose smile looking up she met, watching, indulgent of her *détour* and, as too eagerly she moved forward, indulgent also of that Here, if she would, was a friend, and, although middle-aged, a contemporary self-confessed by a note in her voice of impatience over waste of time in preliminaries

But Mrs Harcourt did not know how nimbly she could move, might think it strange when presently her voice must betray that she was already rejoicing—defying the note of warning that sounded far away within her—in a well-known presence, singing recklessly to it the song of new joy and life begun anew that all the way from England had been gathering within her

The announcement of her own name made the woman again a stranger, so much was she a stranger to the life belonging to the name, and brought into sudden prominence the state of her gown, exposed now in its full length She recounted the tragedy and saw Mrs Harcourt's smile change to real concern

Here they were, alone together, seeming to have leapt rather than passed through the early stages

Like love, but unobstructed A balance of side-by-side, not of opposition More open than love, yet as hidden and wonderful, rising from the same depth

'Hold it in front of the radiator Vat 'll take 'em out a bit Such a poo'hy gown' She moved a little back from the row of pipes

Going close to the radiator, Miriam moved into a fathomless gentleness

But it was also a demand, so powerful that it was drawing all her being to a point All that she had brought with her into the room would be absorbed and scattered, leaving her robbed of things not yet fully her own

The warning voice within was crying aloud now, urging her not only to escape before the treasures of arrival and of strangeness were lost beyond recovery, but to save also the past, disappeared round the corner, yet not out of sight but drawn closely together in the distance, a swiftly moving adventure,

lit from point to point by the light in which to-day she had bathed forgetful

Even a little talk, a little answering of questions, would falsify the past. Set in her own and in this woman's mind in a mould of verbal summarizings, it would hamper and stain the brightness of to-morrow.

She found herself hardening, seeking generalizations that would cool and alienate, and was besieged by memories of women whom she had thus escaped. And of their swift revenge. But this woman was not of those who avenge themselves.

Hesitating before the sound of her own voice, or the other which would sound if this second's silence were prolonged, she was seized by revolt—the determination at all costs to avoid hearing in advance, in idle words above the ceaseless intercourse of their spirits, about Oberland, even from one whose seeing might leave her own untouched.

To open the way for flight she remarked that it must be late. 'About nine. You're dead beat, I can see. Ought to go to bed.'

'Not for worlds,' said Miriam involuntarily.

Mrs Harcourt's face, immediately alight for speech, expressed as she once more took possession of the radiator and looked down at it as into a fire, willingness to stand indefinitely by.

'Every one's gone to bed. Bein' out all day in vis air makes you sleepy at night.'

Remembering that of course she would speak without gaps, Miriam glanced at the possibility of pulling herself together for conversation.

'I been pottering. My ski are at Zurbuchen's bein' repaired.'

'But what a *perfect* Swiss name. Like oak, like well-baked bread.'

To get away now. Sufficient impression of the Alpenstock people perpetually strenuous, living for sport, and, redeeming its angularity, the rich Swiss background Zurbuchen. But Mrs Harcourt's glance of surprised delight—there was amusement too, she didn't think Swiss names worth considering—

meant that she was entertained, anticipating further entertainment, to which she would not contribute

‘No I’m supposed to sit about and rest Overwork’

‘You won’t Lots of people come out like vat You’ll soon find resting a baw out heah’

‘Should like a little sleep I’ve had none for two nights’

‘Stop in bed to-morrow Have your meals up’

‘M’m

For a moment Mrs Harcourt waited, silent, not making the movement of departure that would presently bring down the shadow of returning loneliness her words had drawn so near, keeping her leaning pose, her air of being indefinitely available

The deep bell of her voice dropped from its soft single note to a murmur rising and falling, a low narrative tone, hurrying

Through the sound, still coming and going in her mind, of the name Mrs Harcourt had so casually spoken, bringing with it the sunlit mountains and the outer air waiting in to-morrow, Miriam heard that the people at the Alpenstock were all right—with the exception of the two sitting at dinner on Mrs Harcourt’s left, ‘outsiders’ of a kind now appearing in Oberland for the first time Saddened by their exclusion, embarrassed by unconscious flattery, Miriam impulsively asked their name and glowed with a sudden vision of Mrs Corrie, of how she would have embraced this opportunity for wicked mondaine wit Mrs Harcourt, for a moment obediently reflecting, said she had forgotten it but that it was somefing raver fwightful Every one else, introduced by name, received a few words of commendation—excepting the Russian and the American The Russian would be just a foreigner, an unfortunate, but the American surely must be an outsider? Insincerely, as if in agreement with this division of humanity by exclusion, she put in a question, and while Mrs Harcourt pulled up her discourse to say, as if sufficiently, that he was staying only a couple of days and passed on to summon other hotels to the tribunal, she was glad that the Russian had been left untouched Harry Vereker, fine, a first-class sportsman and altogether nice chap, was already lessened, domesticated, general property in his niceness, but the Russian remained, wistfully alone attractive

hidjus big hotel only just built, all glass and glare
It 'll be the ruin of Oberland No one 'll come here next year'

Though still immersed in her theme Mrs Harcourt was aware, when next she glanced to punctuate a statement, if not exactly that instead of the object she offered it was herself and her glance that was being seen—the curious steeliness of its indignation—at least of divided attention, a sudden breach in their collaboration, and immediately she came to the surface, passing without pause to her full bell note, with an inquiry Hoping to please But why hoping to please?

This abrupt stowing away of her chosen material might be a simple following of the rules of her world, it suggested also the humouring of a patient by a watchful nurse, and since she had the advantage of not being in the depths of fatigue this perhaps was its explanation, but much more clearly it spoke her years of marriage, of dealing with masculine selfishness And she was so swift, so repentant of her long, enjoyable excursion, that it was clear she had suffered masculine selfishness gladly Neither understanding nor condemning It had not damaged her love and she had suffered bitterly when it was removed

Suffering was pleading now in her eyes off their guard in this to-and-fro of remarks that was a little shocking the reverberation of a disaster

Now that it was clear that her charming behaviour from the first might be explained by the attraction there was for her in a mannish mental hardness, that she sought in its callousness both something it could never give, as well as entertainment, and rest from perpetual feeling, she ceased to be interesting She herself made it so clear that she had nothing to give Offering her best help, what in the way of her world would be most useful to one newly arrived, she was yet suppliant, and afraid of failure, haunted by the fear of a failure she did not understand and that was perhaps uniform in her experience

Miriam found her own voice growing heavy with the embarrassment of her discoveries and her longing to break this so eagerly woven entanglement Trying again for cooling generalities, she had the sense of pouring words into a void The gentle presence hovered there, played its part, followed,

answered, but without sharing the effort to swim into the refreshing tide of impersonality, without seeing the independent light on the scraps of reality she was being offered. No wonder perhaps they were a little breathless. She was scenting apology and retreat. And did not know that it was retreat not at all from herself, but from her terrible alacrity and transparency the way the whole of her was at once visible. All her thoughts, her way of thinking in words, in set phrases gathered from too enclosed an experience. Enclosed. To be with her was enclosure. The earlier feeling of being encompassed that was so welcome because it was so womanly, so exactly what a man needs in its character of kindly confessor and giver of absolution in advance, had lost value before the discovery of this absence of vistas, this frightful sense of being shut in with assumptions about life that admit of no question and no modification.

Again the dead husband intruded, his years of life at this woman's side, his first adoration of her, and then his weariness, fury of weariness whose beginnings she felt herself already tasting, so that for sheer pity she was kept in her place, effusive, unable to go.

But at the moment of parting Mrs Harcourt became again that one who had waited, impatient of wasting time in formalities. Her smile glanced out from the past, revealing the light upon her earlier days. It was a greeting for to-morrow rather than a good night.

Going up to the little bedroom that was now merely a refuge off-stage, she found it brightly lit in readiness for her coming, summery bright all over, the light curtains drawn and joining with the unvarnished wood to make an enclosure that seemed to emulate the brightness of the Swiss daylight. The extravagant illumination, the absence of glooms and shadows, recalled the outdoor scene and something of this afternoon's bliss of arrival and the joy that had followed it, when music sounded up through the house, of home-coming from long exile. Switzerland waited outside—enriched by her successful début—with its promise that could not fail. Meanwhile there was the unfamiliar enchantment of moving comfortably in a warm

bedroom, not having the wealth one brought upstairs instantly dispersed by the attack of cold and gloom. The temperature was lower than before, pleasant, no longer oppressive, and more hospitable than a fire whose glow was saddened by the certainty that in the morning it would be an ashy desolation.

The moment the basket chair received her the downstairs world was about her again, circling, clamorous with the incidents of her passage from lonely exposure to the shelter of Mrs Harcourt's so swiftly offered wing, from beneath which, with its owner assured of the hardness of what it sheltered, she could move freely forth in any direction.

The two Le Mesras—that was her pronunciation of *Le Mesurier*? Three Chators. Mrs Sneyde and Maud Something at the little table behind. Hollebhone. Maud Hollebhone. The American, leaving. Interest hesitated between Harry Vereker, already a little diminished, and the Russian the reincarnated, attractive, ultimately unsatisfactory Tansley Street foreigner?

Someone was tapping at the door. She opened it upon Mrs Harcourt offering a small tray, transformed to motherliness by a voluminous dressing-gown.

When she had gone she vanished utterly. There she was, actually in the next room, yet utterly forgettable. And yet she threw across the days ahead a strange deep light.

The steaming chocolate and the little English biscuits disappeared too quickly, leaving hunger.

The french window was made fast by a right-angle hand-piece, very stiff, that gave suddenly with a dreadfully audible clang. The door creaked open. Racing the advancing air she was beneath the downy billow before it reached her. It took her fevered face with its battalions of needles, stole up her nostrils to her brain, bore her down into the uttermost depths of sleep.

CHAPTER III

FROM which she awoke in light that seemed for a moment to be beyond the confines of earth. It was as if all her life she had travelled towards this radiance, and was now within it, clear of the past, at an ultimate destination.

How long had it been there, quizzically patient, waiting for her to be aware of it?

It was sound, that had wakened her and ceased now that she was looking and listening, become the inaudible edge of a sound infinitely far away. Brilliant light, urgently describing the outdoor scene. But she was unwilling to stir and break the radiant stillness.

Close at hand a bell buzzed sharply. Another, and then a third far away down the corridor. People ringing their day into existence, free to ring their day into existence when they pleased. She was one of them, and for to-day she would wait awhile, give the bell-ringers time to be up and gone down to breakfast while she kept intact, within this miracle of light, the days ahead that with the sounding of her own bell would be already in process of spending.

But perhaps there was a time-limit for breakfasts?

Screwing round to locate the bell with the minimum of movement, she paused in sheer surprise of well-being. Of the shattering journey there was not a trace. Nor of the morning weariness following social excitements.

Sitting up to search more effectually, she saw the source of her wakening, bright gold upon the mountain tops, a smiling challenge, as if, having put on their morning gold, the mountains watched its effect upon the onlookers.

She was glad to be alone on the scene of last night's dinner-party, to be in the company of the other breakfasters

represented only by depleted butter-dishes and gaps in the piles of rolls, and free from the risk of hearing the opening day fretted by voices set going like incantations to exorcize the present as if it had no value, as if the speakers were not living in it but only in yesterday or to-morrow

And when there came a warning swift clumping of hob-nailed boots across the hall, across the room, she demanded Vereker, oddly certain that even at this late hour still somehow it would contrive to be he

And there he was, lightly clumping round the table-end to his place, into which he slipped smiling his greeting, boyishly Not at all in the self-conscious Englishman's manner of getting himself seated when others are already in their places bent, just before sitting down, forward from the waist and, in that pose—hitching his trousers the while—distributing his greetings, and so letting himself down into his chair either with immediate speech or a simulated air of preoccupation Vereker flopped and beamed at the same moment, unfeignedly pleased to arrive Knickerbockers, but that was not the whole difference He was always unfeignedly pleased to arrive?

He began at once collecting food and spoke with gentle suddenness into a butter-dish

'I hope you had a good night?'

His talk made a little symphony with his movements which also were conversational, and he looked across each time he spoke, but only on the last word, a swift blue beam In the morning light he seemed younger—perhaps a champion ski-er at the end of his day is as tired as a hard-worked navvy?—and a certain air of happy gravity and the very fair curly hair shining round its edges from recent splashings, gave him, in his very white, very woolly sweater, something of the look of a newly bathed babe in its matinée jacket—in spite of the stern presence, above the rolled top of his sweater, of an inch of stiff linen collar highly glazed

He was of a type and of a class, and also, in a way not quite clear, a tempered, thoroughly live human being, something more in him than fine sportsman and nice fellow, giving him weight Presently she found its marks a pleat between the

brows and, far away within his eyes even when they smiled, a sadness, that sounded too in his cheerful voice, a puzzled, perpetual compassion

For the world? For himself?

But these back premises were touched with sunlight. Some sense of things he had within him that made him utterly *kind*

'Isn't it extraordinary,' she said, hoping to hide the fact that she had missed his last remark, 'the way these people leave the lights switched on all the time, everywhere?'

'Cheap electricity,' he said as if in parenthesis, and as if apologetically reminding her of what she already knew—'Water power. They pay a rate and use as much as they like.'

In all his answers there was this manner of apologizing for giving information. And his talk, even the perfect little story of the local barber and the newspapers, which he told at top pace as if grudging the moment it wasted, was like a shorthand annotation to essential unspoken things, shared interests and opinions taken for granted. Talking with him, she no longer felt as she had done last night either that she was at a private view of an exclusive exhibition, or gathering fresh light on social problems. There was in him something unbounded, that enhanced the light reflected into the room from the sunlit snow. His affectionate allusion to his Cambridge brought to her mind complete in all its parts—together with gratitude for the peace he gave in which things could expand unhindered—her own so sparse possession. Her week-ends there with the cousins, their blinkered, comfort-loving academic friends, the strange sense of at once creeping back into security and realizing how far she had come away from it, their kindnesses, their secret hope of settling her for life in their enclosed world, and their vain efforts to mould her to its ways, and then the end, the growing engrossments in London breaking the link that held her to them and to the past they embodied—and Cambridge left, lit by their sweet hospitality, by the light streaming on Sunday afternoons through King's Chapel windows, the Backs in sunlight, and a memory of the halting little chime.

When she told him of the things that Cambridge had left with her, she paused just in time to escape adding to them the

gait of the undergraduates the slovenly stride whose each footfall sent the chin forward with a henlike jerk

He agreed at once with her choice, but hesitated over the little chime

'It might have been a new church I never saw it But if you had once heard it you *couldn't* forget it'

It was absurd to be holding to her solitary chime in face of his four years' residence But it seemed now desperately important to state exactly the quality she had felt and never put into words She sat listening—aware of him waiting in a sympathetic stillness—to each note as it sounded out into the sky above the town, making it no longer Cambridge but a dream city, subduing the graceless modern bricks and mortar to harmony with the ancient beauty of the colleges—until the whole was a loveliness beneath the evening sky—and presently found herself speaking with reckless enthusiasm

'*Don't* you remember the four little gentle tuneless phrases, of six and seven notes alternately, one for each quarter, and at the hour sounding one after the other with a little pause between each, seeming to ask you to look at what it saw, at the various life of the town made suddenly wonderful and strange, and the last phrase, beginning with a small high note that tapped the sky, and wandering down to the level and stopping without emphasis, leaving everything at peace and very beautiful?'

'I think I *can't* have heard it,' he said wistfully, and sat contemplative in a little pause during which it occurred to her, becoming aware of the two of them talking on and on into the morning, that it rested with her to wind up the sitting, that he might perhaps, if not quite immediately, yet in intention be waiting for her to rise and spare him the apparent discourtesy of pleading an engagement Even failing the engagement, they could not sit here for ever, and the convention of his world demanded that she should be the first to go

She had just time to note, coming from far away within herself, a defiance that would sooner inflict upon him the discomfort of breaking the rule than upon herself the annoyance of moving at its bidding, when he looked across and said with the

bowing attitude he had held last night as he spoke and waited for her to become aware of him 'May I put you up for the ski-club?'

It was, of course, his business to cultivate new people, and, if they seemed suitable, to collect them

She smiled acknowledgment and insincerely pleaded the shortness of her stay All she could do, short of blurting out her poverty which he seemed not to have perceived

But a fortnight was, he declared, the ideal time to learn and to get on well enough to want to come out again next year, and hurried on to promise a fellow sufferer, a friend coming up, for only a few days, from the south, who would be set immediately to work and on whose account he was committed to-day to trek down to the station

'We were,' he said, for the first time looking across almost before he spoke, and with the manner now of making a direct important communication, 'at Cambridge together'

A valued friend, being introduced, recommended, put before himself Warmth crept into his voice, and lively emphasis—compressed into a small note of distress That note was his social utmost, for gravity and for joy, recalling Selma Holland—when she was deeply moved a wailing tone, deprecating, but in his tone was more wistfulness, a suggestion too of anxiety It had begun when he spoke of Pater's *Renaissance Studies*, but had then merely sounded into the golden light, intensifying it Now it seemed to flout the light, flout everything but his desire to express the absent friend

'That was some years ago Since then he has been a very busy man, saying to this one go and he goeth' He smiled across as if asking her to share the strangeness of his friend's metamorphosis

'You've not seen him since?'

'Not since he bought his land'

'He's a landowner,' she said, and fell into sadness

'He is indeed, on quite a big scale, and a very hardworking one'

'A farmer,' murmured Miriam, 'that's not so bad'

'It's very arduous He is always at his post Never takes

a holiday For three winters I've tried to get him up here for a week'

'Absolute property in land,' she said to the sunlit snow, 'is a crime'

Before her, side by side with a vision of Rent as a clutching monster astride upon civilization, was a picture of herself, suddenly hitting out at these pleasant people, all, no doubt, landowners It was only because the friend had been presented to her in the distance and with, as it were, all his land on his back, that this one article of the Lycurgan faith of which she had no doubt, had at all reared itself in her mind And as it came, dictating her words while she stood by counting the probable cost and wondering too over the great gulf between one's most cherished opinions about life and one's sense of life as it presents itself piecemeal embodied in people, she heard with relief his unchanged voice

'Oh, please tell me why'

And turned to see him flushed, smiling, pardoning her lapse, apologizing for pardoning it, and altogether interested

'It's a whole immense subject and I'm not a specialist But the theory of Rent has been worked out by those who are, by people sincerely trying to discover where it is that temporarily useful parts of the machinery of civilization have got out of gear and become harmful No one ought to have to pay for the right to sit down on the earth No one ought to be so helplessly expropriated that another can *buy* him and use him up as he would never dream of using up more costly material—horses for instance'

'You are a socialist?'

Into her answer came the sound of a child's voice in plaintive recitative, approaching from the hall

'Daphne in trouble,' he said, 'you'll tell me more, I *hope*'—and turned his pleading smile to meet people coming in at the door They clumped to the small table nearer the further window and she caught a sideways glimpse before they sat down a slender woman with red-gold hair carrying a bunchy little girl whose long legs dangled against her skirt—Mrs Sneyde, the grass-widow, and, making for the far side of the

table a big buoyant girlish young woman—uninteresting—the sister-in-law, Maud Hollebone

The child's 'so bitter, *bitter* cold,' sounded clear through the morning greetings in which she took no part Her voice was strange, low and clear, and full of a meditative sincerity Amidst the interchange of talk between Vereker and the two women it prevailed again a plaintive monologue addressed to the universe

The grating of a chair and there she was, confronting the talking Vereker, who was on his feet and just about to go She stood gazing up, with her hands behind her back A rounded face and head, cleanly revealed by the way the fine silky brown hair was strained back across the skull, bunchy serge dress and stiff white pinafore Pausing, Vereker looked down at her

'You going out, Vereker?'

'Not yet'

'Your friend coming? Not telegraphed or anything?'

'He's coming all right, Daphne He'll be here to-night You'll see him in the morning'

'You'll be writing your letters till you start?'

'I may'

'Then I'll come and sit in your room till my beecely walk'

She rapped out her statements—immediately upon his replies, making him sound gentle and slow—from the childish, rounded face that was serenely thinking, full of quick, calm thought Regardless talk was going forward at the other table to which, her business settled, she briskly returned

The little wooden hall was like a summer-house that was also a sports pavilion Against the wall that backed the dining-room stood bamboo chairs uncertain, as if, belonging elsewhere and having been told not to block the gangway by moving into the open, they did not know what they were for The table to which they belonged stood boldly in the centre and held an ash-tray Between it and the front door, from above which the antlered head of a chamois gazed down upon the small

scene, the way was clear, but the rest of the floor space was invaded on all sides by toboggans propped against the wall or standing clear with boots lying upon them, slender boots gleaming with polish and fitted with skates that appeared to be nothing but a single brilliant blade. Against one wall was a pair of things like oars. Ski? But thought of as attached to a human foot they seemed impossibly long.

From a hidden region, away beyond the angle of the staircase, came servants' voices, staccato, and abrupt sounds the sounds of their morning campaign, giving an air of callous oblivion to the waiting implements of sport, and quenching, with the way they had of seeming to urge the residents forth upon their proper business outdoors, the hesitant invitation of the chairs.

Beyond the dining-room and this little hall, whose stillness murmured incessantly of activities, there was no refuge but the dejected little salon.

Filled with morning light it seemed larger, a little important and quite self-sufficient, giving out its secret strangeness of a Swiss room, old, pre-existing English visitors, proof, with its way of being, set long ago and unaltered, against their travelled hilarity. The little parlour piano, precious in chosen wood highly polished, with faded yellow keys and faded silk behind its trellis, was full of old music, seemed to brood over the carollings of an ancient simplicity unknown to the modern piano whose brilliant black-and-white makes it sound in a room all the time, a ringing accompaniment to the life of to-day.

But into this averted solitude there came to her again the sense of time pouring from an inexhaustible source gentle, marvellous, unutterably *kind*. It came in through the window whose screened light, filling the small room and halting meditatively there, seemed to wait for song.

Drawing back the flimsy curtain from the window, she found it a door giving on a covered balcony through whose panes she saw wan sunless snowfields and, beyond them, slopes, patched with black pine woods and rising in the distance to a high ridge, a smooth bulging thickness of snow against deep blue sky. The dense pine woods thinned as they climbed into small

straggling groups, with here and there a single file of trees, small and sharp-pointed, marching towards the top of the ridge

Beautiful this sharp etching far-off of keen black pines upon the sunless snow, and strange the clear deep blue of the sky
But mournful, remote and self-sufficient Switzerland, averted and a little discouraging

The balcony extended right and left, and a glimpse away to the left of mats hanging out into the open, and a maid pouncing forth upon them with a beater, sent her to the right, where the distance was obscured by a building standing at right angles to the house, a battered barn-like place, unbalconied, but pierced symmetrically by little windows, chalet, warm rich brown, darkened above by its sheltering, steeply jutting roof
beautiful Its kindness extended all about it, lending a warmth even to the far-off desolate slopes

A door at her side revealed the dining-room lengthwise and deserted, and then she was round the angle of the house and free of its secret its face towards the valley that was now a vast splendour of sunlight

Every day, through these windows that framed the view in strips, this light would be visible in all its changings Standing at the one that glazed the great mountain whose gold had wakened her, she discovered that the balcony was a veranda, had in front of it a railed-in space set with chairs and tables
In a moment she was out in the open light, upon a shelf, within the landscape that seemed now to be the whole delight of Switzerland outspread before her eyes

Far away below, cleft along its centre by the irregular black line of its frozen river, was the wide white floor of the valley, measuring the mountains that rose upon its hither side

Those high, high summits, beetling variously up into the top of the sky, where patches of tawny rock broke through their smooth whiteness against its darkest blue, knew nothing of the world below where their bases went downward in a great whiteness of broadening irregular slopes that presently bore pines in single file upwards advancing from the dense clumps

upon the lower ridges, and met in an extended mass along the edge of the valley floor

Here and there, clear of the pine woods, and looking perilously high and desolate, a single chalet made a triangular warm brown blot upon the dazzling snow

In this crystal stillness the smallest sound went easily up to the high peaks, to the high pure blue

Turning to bless the well-placed little hotel, she met a frontage of blank windows, each with its sharply jutting balcony, jaws, dropped beneath the blind stare of the windows set for ever upon a single scene Hotel, queer uncherished thing No one to share its life and make it live

On a near table was a folded newspaper, thin, heavily printed, continental Switzerland radiant all about her and the Swiss world within her hands—a reprieve from further seeing and a tour, into the daily life of this country whose living went on within a setting that made even advertisements look lyrical

The simple text was enthralling For years she had not so delighted in any reading In the mere fact of the written word, in the building of the sentences, the movement of phrases linking part with part It was all quite undistinguished, a little crude and hard, demanding, seeming to assume a sunny hardness in mankind And there was something missing whose absence was a relief, like the absence of heaviness in the air Everything she had read stood clear in her mind that yet, insufficiently occupied with the narrative and its strange emanations, caught up single words and phrases and went off independently touring, climbing to fresh arrangements and interpretations of familiar thought

And this miracle of renewal was the work of a single night

The need for expression grew burdensome in the presence of the empty sun-blistered tables Perhaps these lively clarities would survive a return journey through the hotel?

Voices sounded up from below, from the invisible roadway English laughter, of people actively diverting themselves in the winter landscape Far away within each one was the uncommunicating English spirit, heedless, but not always unaware,

filling its day with habitual, lively-seeming activities. The laughter sounded insincere, as if defying a gloom it refused to face.

They passed out of hearing and the vast stillness, restored, made her look forth at a scene grown familiar, driving her off to fresh seeking while it went its way towards the day when she would see it for the last time, giving her even now, as she surveyed its irrevocably known beauty, a foretaste of the nostalgia that must rend her when once more she was down upon the plains.

But that time was infinitely far away beyond the days during which she was to live perpetually with this scene that clamoured now to be communicated in its first freshness.

The writing at top speed of half a dozen letters left arrival and beginning in the past, the great doorway of the enchantments she had tried to describe safely closed behind her, and herself going forward within them. With letters to post she must now go forth, secretly, as it were behind her own back, into Oberland, into the scene that had seemed full experience and was but its overture.

The letters were disappointing. Only in one of them had she escaped expressing yesterday's excited achievements and set down instead the living joy of to-day. And this for the one to whom such joy was incredible. But all were warm with affection newly felt. The long distance not only made people very dear—in a surprising way it rearranged them. Foremost amongst the men was Densley of the warm heart and wooden head, wildly hailed. His letter, the last and shortest, wrote itself in one sentence, descriptive, laughing, affectionate. How it would surprise him.

Life, she told herself as she crossed the hall trying to drown the kitchen sounds by recalling what had flashed across her mind as she wrote to Densley, is eternal because joy is 'Future life' is a contradiction in terms. The deadly trap of the adjective *Pourquoi dater?* Even science insists on indestructibility—yet marks for destruction the very thing that enables

it to recognize indestructibility But it had come nearer and clearer than that

Fawn-coloured woolly puppies, romping in the thick snow at the side of the steps as though it were grass, huge, as big as lion cubs, with large snub faces, and dense short bushy coats trying to curl, evenly all over their tubby tumbling bodies St Bernards, at home in their snow They flung themselves at her hands, mumbling her gloves, rolling over with the smallest shove, weak and big and beautiful, and with absurd miniature barkings

The Alpenstock was at the higher end of the village and from its steps she could see down the narrow street to where the little church and its white-cloaked sugar-loaf spire obscured the view, and away to the right, set clear of the village and each on the crest of a gentle slope, the hotels, four, five, big buildings, not unbeautiful with their peaked roofs and balconies and the brilliance of green shutters on their white faces And even the largest, Mrs Harcourt's 'hidjus big place' recognizable by its difference, a huge square plaster box, patterned with rows and rows of uniform windows, above whose flat roof a high pole flaunted a flag limp in the motionless air, looked small and harmless, a doll's house dumped casually, lost in the waste of snow

If these hotels were full, there were in the village more visitors than natives But where were they? The vast landscape was empty From its thickly mantled fields came the smell of snow

Going down the street, she was lost in a maze of fugitive scents within one pervading, and that seemed to compose the very air the sweet deep smell of burning pine wood Moving within it, as the crowded little shop windows went by on either hand, were the smells of dried apples and straw and a curious blending of faint odours that revealed themselves—when presently summoning an excuse for the excitement of shopping, at the cost of but a few of the multitude of small coins representing an English sovereign, she gained the inside of the third

general store between the hotel and the church—as the familiar smell of mixed groceries, with a difference—clean smells, baked dry. No prevailing odour of moist bacon and mouldering cheese, of spilt paraffin and musty sacking, and things left undisturbed in corners. No dinginess. And though shelves and counter were crowded, every single thing gleamed and displayed itself with an air.

But there were no Swiss biscuits. Only a double row of the familiar square tins from Reading, triumphantly displayed by the gaunt sallow-faced woman, whose ringing voice was as disconcertingly at variance with her appearance as was her charmed manner with the eager cunning that sat in her eyes. She asked for soap and the woman set wide the door of an upright glass case in which were invitingly set forth little packets bearing names that in England were household words.

She glanced back at the biscuits. *Petit Beurre* were after all foreign and brought with them, always, the sight of Dinant and its rock coming into view, ending the squabble about the pronunciation of *grenouille*, as the Meuse steamer rounded the last bend. But catching sight, above the biscuits, of a box of English night-lights, she chose a piece of soap at random and fought, while she responded to the voluble chantings accompanying the packing of her parcel, with the nightmare vision of bedrooms *never* bathed in darkness, of people *never* getting away into the night, people insisting, even in rooms where brilliance can be switched on at will, on the perpetual presence of the teasing little glimmer, people who travel in groups and bring with them so much of their home surroundings that they destroy daily, piecemeal, the sense of being abroad.

Regaining the street in possession of a replica of the tablet she had unpacked last night, she found that the busy midst of the village lay just ahead where the way widened to encircle the little church. Many shops, some of them new-built, with roomy windows, and the lifeless impersonal appearance of successful provincial stores. There were more people here, more women in those heavy black dresses and head-shawls, more bloused and bearded men, crossing the snowy road with

swift slouching stride A post office, offering universal hospitality

Post office offering universal hospitality more vitally than the little church A beggar could perhaps find help in a church more easily than in a post office Yet the mere atmosphere of a post office offered something a church could never give Even to enter it and come away without transactions was to have been in the midst of life And to handle stamps, and especially foreign stamps, was to be aware of just those very distances the post had abolished

As if from the bright intense sunlight all about her, a ray of thought had fallen upon the mystery of her passion for soap, making it so clear in her mind that the little ray, and the lit images waiting for words, could be put aside in favour of a strange dingy building breaking the line of shops Looking like a warehouse, it had a small battered door, high up, approached by a flight of steps leading from either side whose meeting made a little platform before the door Rough sleds were drawn up round about the entrance, making it central in the little open space about the church, the perpetual head-tossings of the horses filling the bright air with showers of tinkles It could hardly be a café, yet two men had just clattered down the steps flushed and garrulous Strange dark-looking hostelry, within which shone the midday sun of these rough men living in far-away chalets among the snow

It was not only the appeal of varying shape and colour, or even of the many perfumes each with its power of evoking images the heavy voluptuous scents suggesting brunette adventuresses, Turkish cigarettes, and luxurious idleness, the elusive and delicate, that could bring spring-time into a winter bedroom darkened by snow-clouds The secret of its power was in the way it pervaded one's best realizations of everyday life No wonder Beethoven worked at his themes washing and re-washing his hands And even in merely washing with an empty mind there is a *charm*, though it is an empty charm, the illusion of beginning, as soon as you have finished, all over again as a different person But all great days had soap, impressing its qualities upon you, during your most intense

moments of anticipation, as a prelude And the realization of a good day past, coming with the early morning hour, is accompanied by soap Soap is with you when you are in that state of feeling life at first hand that makes even the best things that can happen important not so much in themselves as in the way they make you conscious of life, and of yourself living Every day, even those that are called ordinary days, with its miracle of return from sleep, is heralded by soap, summoning its retinue of companion days

To buy a new cake of soap is to buy a fresh stretch of days Its little weight, treasure, minutely heavy in the hand, is life, past, present, and future, compactly welded

The priced goods in the shop-windows were discouragingly high One window behind whose thick plate glass were set forth just a few things very tastefully arranged, showed no prices at all and had the ominous note of a West End shop Next door was a windowful that might have been transplanted from Holborn, so much steel was there, such an array of rectangular labels and announcements Skates and skates and skates Then a chemist's and an inspiration, though the window showed nothing but a perforated screen and the usual coloured bottles bulging on a shelf above

The counter was stacked with wares from Wigmore Street Even the tooth-brushes were those of the new shape devised in Cavendish Square The chemist was a bald preoccupied man speaking English abruptly She came away with a jar of Smith's cream, her shopping done and the face of the clock sticking out above the watchmaker's telling her it was nearly noon The little clock on the church said a quarter past eleven and glancing back at the watchmaker's, now in the rear, she saw the reverse dial of the outstanding clock marking half past eleven And Switzerland was the land of watchmakers

Her own watch said one o'clock, English time Then it was noon But this far world was not three minutes' distance from the Alpenstock There was still half an hour

The post office was a sumptuous hall Little tables stood about invitingly, set with pens and ink No railed counter, a wooden partition extending to the ceiling, a row of arched

pigeon-holes, all closed Like a railway booking-office on Sunday, between trains—blankly indifferent to the announcement of the presence of a customer made by the clumping of her boots upon the wooden floor And when presently—having gone the round of the posters, brilliant against the white-washed walls, all so much brighter and so much less bright than reality, all resounding with a single deep charm, bringing assurance of possessing, in one journey and one locality, the being of the whole—she tapped at a little shutter, it flew up impatiently, revealing an affronted young man in a blue cotton overall, glaring reproachfully through spectacles The stamps handed over, the little door shot back into place with a bang, as if cursing an intruder

The open spaces called for a first view before the sense of its being no longer morning should have robbed them of intensity But where the street joined the roadway there was a little shop, full sunlight falling on its window, whose contents were a clustered delight and each separate thing more charming than its neighbour

Two women approaching along the road preceded by English voices distracted her, for a moment, with the strangeness of their headdress—a sort of cowl In a moment they passed with dangling clinking skates, and her intention of getting a good view from behind was diverted back to the shop window, by 'tourist-trap' interpolated in a tone meant to be inaudible, in the dissertation of the one holding forth in a voice not unlike Mrs Harcourt's, about a hotel 'packed like a bee-hive and swarming with influenza'

It was true The shop was full of Swiss brummagem She fastened on it the more eagerly Little expensive cheap things whose charm was beyond price Small clumsy earthenware, appealingly dumpy, flower-patterned upon a warm creamy background, painted wooden spoons Little brooches and trinkets innumerable Cow-bells Some small thing for everybody and a problem solved at the cost of a few marks

Turning away, she caught sight of an old woman amazingly wrapped up, peering at her from inside a little booth set down in the snow on the other side of the way A shelf laden with

small things in carved wood protruded in front. She crossed to look at them. Silently, with slow fumbling movements, the old woman displayed her wares. Bears. Bears on ski, on toboggans, bears in every kind of unbearlike attitude. Intricate model chalets, useless and suggesting, imagined in England, nothing but the accumulation of dust. But there was an owl, with owlish dignity, very simply and beautifully carved. Her eyes returned to it, and the old woman put forth an aged freckled hand and grasped its head, which went easily back upon a hinge and left revealed a clean white china inkwell.

'Kipsake,' said the old woman huskily.

'*Danke schon. Ich komme wieder,*' smiled Miriam escaping, followed by hoarse cacklings of praise.

Out upon the roadway fenced between dazzling snowfields, the end of the valley came into sight, new, but faintly reproachful, having waited too long, and complaining now about the lateness of the hour. Certainly it was worthy of a whole self, undistracted. But there was to-morrow, many to-morrows. She had done with the street and the shops, save as a corridor, growing each day more dear, to daily fulfilment of the promise of this prospect whose beauty she was clearly recognizing. And more than its beauty. Its great, great power of assertion, veiled for the moment by distractions, but there. Wonderfully beautiful was the speech and movement of the far-off smooth pure ridge of snow, rising high against the deepest blue of the sky, linking twin peaks.

Some of the near slopes were dotted with people, tiny figurines mitigating the snowfields and the towering mountains, the sounds of English voices ringing out infinitesimal in the wide space, yet filling it. Shutting out the scene, yet intensifying it, bringing gratitude for their presence.

That remained even after the quaint peaked hoods of brilliant white or mauve, the effective skirts and jerseys of a group of women passing in the roadway had rebuked with their colours, clean and sharp against the snow, her tweed that in London had seemed a good choice, and her London felt hat.

But though the clever clothes of these people brought a sense of exile, they were powerless to rouse envy or any desire. Envy

was impossible in this air that seemed, so sharp was every outline, to be no longer earth's atmosphere but open space, electric

Perhaps even this morning there was time to get clear, to be, if only for a few moments, along some side track alone with the landscape, walking lightly clad in midsummer sun through this intensity of winter

The road was dropping and growing harder No longer crunching under her feet, the snow, beaten flat, showed here and there dark streaks of ice, and her puttee-bandaged legs, flexible only at the knees, felt like sticks above her feet, lost and helpless in the thick boots that seemed to walk of themselves

The dropping road took a sharp turn towards the valley, showing ahead a short empty stretch and another sharp turn, revealing it as the winding trail up which she had come last night On the right it was joined by a long track running steeply down into a wilderness of snow in the midst of whose far distances appeared, high up, a little bridge half hidden amongst pines The track was dotted with pigmy forms

'Ash-tongue!' A fierce hoarse voice just behind and, joining it, another, clear and ringing 'Ach-toooooong'

Plunging into the roadside drift, she turned in time to see a toboggan bearing upon it a boy prone, face foremost eagerly out-thrust, shoot down the slanting road, take the bend at an angle that just cleared the fence and dart at a terrific pace down the slope towards the wilderness, followed by the girl with the ringing voice, lightly seated, her toboggan throwing her up as it bumped skimming from ridge to ridge down the uneven road She took the bend smoothly with space to spare and flew on down the slope with lifted chin and streaming hair Both mad Children of the reckless English who had discovered the Swiss winter

This terrific scooting was not the tobogganing of which she had heard in London Two more figures were coming, giving her excuse to wait, lest they were coming her way, and watch their passing from the drift that was like warm wool, knee-deep They were women, coming slowly, paddling themselves along with little sticks They took the bend with ironic

caution and went on down the slope, still furiously stabbing the snow with their little sticks, their high, peaked cowls making them look like seated gnomes

Aware of intense cold invading her feet, she plunged out into the road and was beating her snow-caked puttees when an intermittent grinding sound, approaching, brought her upright an aged couple side by side, white-haired and immensely muffled, sitting very grave and stern behind the legs protruding stiffly on either side the heads of their toboggans, and set, from moment to moment, heels downwards upon the road to check a possible increase of their slow, triumphant pace. Triumph. Behind the sternness that defied the onlooker to find their pose lacking in dignity, was triumph. Young joy, for these who might well be patrolling, in bath-chairs, the streets of a cathedral town.

And they left the joyous message that this sport, since pace could so easily be controlled, might be tested at once, alone, without instruction, this very afternoon. A subtle change came over the landscape, making it less and more, retiring a little, as who should say then I am to be henceforth a background, already a mere accessory, it yet challenged her vow, an intimidating witness.

Along the empty stretch towards the valley, the blazing sun blotted out the distance so that it was pleasant to turn the next corner and be going again towards the expanse that ended at the white high-hung collar. The fresh stretch of gently sloping road was longer than the one above it, and, walking freely here, she found that her gait had changed, that she was planking along in a lounging stride which brought ease to her bandaged legs and made more manageable her inflexible feet. With a little practice, walking could be a joy. Walking in this scene, through this air, was an occupation in itself. And she was being assailed by the pangs of a piercing hunger. Obtrusive, insistent as the hunger of childhood.

It would take a little longer to go back. It would be wise to turn now. At the corner ending this stretch. Suddenly it seemed immensely important to discover what there was round the next corner. From the angle of the turning, she could see

the little bridge far away to the right, in profile, with pines stretching along the bank of what it spanned, that showed a little further on as a thin straight line of frozen stream steeply descending to join the serpentine that cut the white floor of the valley. Away to the right of the bridge, straggling leafless trees stood in a curve. Behind them something moved, coming and going across the gaps between their trunks. Skaters

Then for the girl and boy that reckless rush was just a transit, a means of getting to the rink, as one might go on a bicycle to a tennis court.

A voice greeted her from behind, surprising, in its level familiarity, until the finished phrase revealed the American, to whom, turning to find him standing before her, his toboggan drawn to heel by its rope, she gave the smile, not for him, the lover's smile reviewing, as they passed her in inverse rotation while she made the long unwelcome journey into his world of an American in Europe, her morning's gatherings.

But he had received it, was telling her that already she looked splendid, adding that when folks first came up they looked, seen beside those already there, just gass'ly. And for a moment the miscarriage was painful to have appeared to drop even below his own level of indiscriminating hail-fellow-well-met. And for a fraction of a second as he stood before her in his correct garb she transformed him into an Englishman condemning her foolish grin—but there was his queer little American smile, that came to her from a whole continent and seemed to demand a large face and form, a little smile dryly sweet, as misdirected as her own and during which they seemed to pour out in unison their independent appreciations, and to recognize and greet in each other, in relation to the English world out here, fellow voyagers in a strange element.

It healed her self-given stripes that were, she reflected as they went on together up the hill, needless, since to him, as an American, her greeting would seem neither naive nor bourgeois. For all Americans are either undisturbedly naive and bourgeois or in a state of merely having learned, via Europe, to be neither. And this man, now launched in speech, revealed

himself by the way he had of handling his statements, as so far very much what he had always been

Strange that it was always queer people, floating mysterious and intangible in an alien element, who gathered up, not wanting them, testimonies that came from her of themselves

All the way back to the Alpenstock he pursued his monologue, information, and in an unbroken flow that by reason of its temperature, its innocence of either personal interest or benevolent intention, left her free to wander. There was in his narrow, unresonant voice only one shape of tone—a discouraged, argumentative rise and fall, very slight, almost on two adjacent notes, colourless, as of one speaking almost unawares at the bidding of an endless uniform perception. She heard it now as statement, now merely as sound, and for a moment as the voice of a friend, while, after informing her that he had done the valley run and climb each morning and taken to-day a last turn to add yet one more layer to his week's sunburn, he remarked that the long zigzag was commonly deserted in the forenoon, folks mostly taking the other track, either to the rink, or further to the made run, or way beyond that to the ski-ing slopes

When she was clear of the shop and crossing the road with the toboggan slithering meekly behind, the invisible distant slopes seemed lonely, and her plan for getting immediately away to them postponed itself in favour of enjoying for a while the thrilled equilibrium with everything about her that was the gift of the slight pull on the cord she was trying to hold with an air of preoccupied negligence. Turning leisurely back from the short length of street ahead that too soon would show the open country, she came once more into the heart of the village and paid an unnecessary visit to the post office, heard the toboggan pull up against the kerb and knew, as she turned to abandon its cord, that she had tasted the utmost of this new joy, and that when once more the cord was in her hands she must go forth and venture

Out on the road beyond the village, the pleasant, even slithering alternated with little silent weightless runs, that at first made her glance back to see if the toboggan were still there. These little runs, increasing as the road began to slope, came as reminders of its character, assertions of its small willingness for its task, enhancing its charm, calling her to turn and survey, as she went, its entrancing behaviour of a little toboggan.

But presently, and as if grown weary of gentle hints, and feeling the necessity of stating more forcibly the meaning of its presence out here in the glittering stillness, it took a sudden run at her heels. Moving sideways ahead, she reduced it to its proper place in the procession until the distance between them set it once more in motion. Overtaking her, it made a half turn, slid a little way broadside and pulled up, facing her, in a small hollow, indignant. In the mercifully empty yet not altogether unobservant landscape it assumed the proportions of a living thing and seemed to say as she approached 'You *can't* bring me out here and make a fool of me'. And indeed, even with no one in sight, she could not permit herself to walk down the slope with the toboggan ahead and pulling like a dog.

She might go back, make a detour on the level round about the village, turn the afternoon into a walk, and postpone until to-morrow the adventure for which now she had neither courage nor desire. In choosing the time when there would be fewest people abroad she had forgotten that it was also the lowest point of the day. Even this first day had a lowest point. And belated prudence, reminding her that she had come away to rest, cast a chill over the empty landscape, changing it from reality to a picture of a reality seen long ago. At the sight of it she turned and went a few paces up the gradient and perched and gathered up the length of cord, and life came back into the wastes of snow, the mountains were real again, quiet in the motionless afternoon light, and the absurd little toboggan a foe about to be vanquished.

It slid off at once, took a small hummock askew, righted itself, to a movement made too instinctively to be instructive, and slid onwards gathering pace.

But ecstasy passed too swiftly into awareness of the bend in

the road now rushing up to meet her ignorance Ramming her heels into the snow she recovered too late, with a jolting pang in both ankles and a headlong dive into this morning's drift, a memory of what she should have done and stood up tingling with joy in the midst of the joyous landscape, stilled again, that had flown with her and swooped up as she plunged, and was now receiving her exciting news

The backward slope invited her to return and go solemnly, braking all the way and testing the half-found secret of steering But the bend tempted her forward A single dig on the left when she reached it and she would be round in face of the long run down to the level

But the dig was too heavy and too soon, and landed her with her feet in the drift and the toboggan swung broadside and all but careering with her backwards along the steepness that lay, when once more she faced it, a headlong peril before the levels leading on and up to the little bridge could come to bring rescue and peace

Pushing carefully off, sliding with bated breath and uncomfortably rasping heels, down and down, making no experiments and thankful only to feel the track slowly ascending behind her, she remained clenched until only a few yards were left down which with feet up she slithered deliriously and came to rest

It was done She had tobogganed herself away from Oberland into the wilderness, the unknown valley waiting now to be explored, with the conquered steed trailing once more meek and unprotesting in the background The afternoon was hers for happiness until hunger, already beginning its apparently almost continuous onslaught, should make welcome the triumphant climb back to Oberland and tea upon the promontory

The high bridge that in the distance looked so small and seemed to span smallness was still small, a single sturdy arch, but beneath it dropped a gorge whose spines led down to a torrent, frozen, strange shapes of leaping water arrested, strangely coloured grey in shadow, black in deep shadow, and here and there, caught by the light, a half-transparent green

There was a great fellowship of pines clustered on either bank and spreading, beyond the bridge, to a wood that sent out

a rising arm blocking the view of the valley and the pass They made a solitude down here above the silenced waters The backward view was closed by the perilous slope whose top was now the sky-line, leaving Oberland far away out of sight in another world

The track through the wood, wide and level for a while, with spired pines marching symmetrically by, narrowed to a winding path that took her in amongst them, into their strange close fellowship that left each one a perfect thing apart Not lonely, nor, for all the high-bulging smoothness of snow in which it stood, cold It was their secret, pine-breath, that brought a sense of warm life, and their close-clustered needles Out on the mountain-sides they looked black and bleak, striving towards the sun until they were stayed by the upper cold Seen close, they were a happy company bearing light upon the green burnish of their needles and the dull live tints of their rough stems And very secret, here thought was sheltered as in a quiet room

Out in the immense landscape, in the down-pouring brilliance of pure light, thought was visible Transparent to the mountains who took its measure and judged, yet without wounding, and even while they made it seem of no account, a small intricate buzzing in the presence of mighty, simple statement sounding just out of reach within the air, and invited thoughtless submission to their influence as to a final infinite good that would remain when they were no more seen, there was pathos in their magnificence, as if they were glad even of one small observing speck, and displayed gently the death they could deal, and smiled in their terrifying power as over an open secret

And to walk and walk on and on amongst them, along their sunlit corridors with thought shut off and being changed, coming back refreshed and changed and indifferent, was what most deeply she now wanted of them

The track climbed a ridge and there, below, were the American's wide snowfields

Before she was assured by the doffed cap outheld while he made his salutation—the sweeping foreign *coup de chapeau* that

was so decisive a politesse compared with the Englishman's meagre small lift, and yet also insolent—she was rejoicing in the certainty that the bearded figure, in spite of the English Norfolk suit and tweed cap, was the big Russian. He alone, at this moment, of all the people in the hotel, would be welcome. Remote, near and friendly as the deepest of her thoughts, and so far away from social conventions and the assumptions behind conventions, as to leave all the loveliness about her unchanged—and yet trailing an absurd little toboggan, smaller, and, in contrast with his height, more ridiculous an appendage than her own. He plunged down the ridge in the English style, by weight and rather clumsily, and in a moment was by her side at the head of the run that went, pure white and evenly flattened, switch-backing away across the field out of sight.

In a slow mournful voice that gave his excellent French a melancholy music, he asked her if she had already tested the run and became, when he had heard the short tale of her adventure, impatiently active. Her toboggan, he said, and raised its fore-part and bent scanning, was too large, too heavy and with runners not quite true. It would be better for the moment to exchange. 'Try, try,' he chanted with the true Russian nonchalance and, abandoning his own, went off down the gentle slope on the discredited mount that now she might blame for her mysterious swerve at the bend.

After the gentle drop carrying him over the first small rise as if it were not there, he flew ahead gathering swiftness with each drop, away and away until at last he appeared a small upright figure far away on the waste of snow.

The run, compared with what she had already attempted, seemed nothing at all. The drops so slight that once or twice she was stranded on a ridge and obliged to push off afresh. And the light little toboggan, responding to the slightest heel-tap upon the hard-pressed snow, taught her at once the secret of steering. And when at last, full of the joy of fresh conquest, she was pulled up by the loose snow at the end of the run, she was eager only to tramp back and begin again. But, tramping at her side, he tore her triumph to shreds. Silently she tried

to imagine the toboggan having its own way uncontrolled for the whole of that sweeping trek, for the two quite steep drops towards the end

The second time he started her in advance and remained behind shouting, his voice rising to a crescendo at the first steepness '*Il n'y a pas de danger!*' With an immense effort she restrained her feet and entered paradise

'*Ça ira, ça ira,*' he admitted smiling when once more they were side by side. They tramped back in silence, under the eyes, as they approached the ridge, of a group newly appeared upon its crest and from which, when they drew near, a voice came down in greeting. She looked up to see the Croydon family, all very trim in sporting garb and carrying skates, gathered in a bunch, at once collectively domestic and singly restive. They smiled eagerly down at her and she read in the father's twinkling gaze that she was providing material for Croydon humour, so distinctly and approvingly was it saying in the Croydon way 'You've not lost much time,' and so swiftly, having told her in response to her own greeting, that the rink was within five minutes' easy walking, did he turn and disappear with his family in tow down the far side of the ridge.

The third run left her weary and satisfied. Again they were tramping back side by side, and although her experience of Russians had taught her that gratitude was out of place and enthusiasm over simple joys a matter for half-envious contempt, her thankfulness and felicity, involuntarily eloquent, treated him, marching tall and sombre at her side upon feet that in spite of the enormous boots showed themselves slender and shapely terminations of a well-hung frame, as if he had been of her own English stock, let him see the value, to herself, of his kindly gift. All she lived for now, she told him, was to rush, safe-guarded by a properly mastered technique, at the utmost possible speed through this indescribable air, down slopes from which the landscape flew back and up. He smiled down, of course, the half-incredulous smile. Of course bored, giving only part of a dreamy attention to all this raving.

'*C'est bon pour la sante,*' he murmured as she paused.

What did he know of *santé*, unless, perhaps, he had been in

a Russian prison? He might be a refugee, an anarchist living in Switzerland

When he, too, turned out to be now returning in search of tea and they were climbing the slope towards Oberland, their toboggans colliding and bumping along as best they might at the ends of cords twisted together round the wrist of his gloveless hand, she remarked by way of relieving a silence he did not seem to think it necessary to break, that the Swiss winter must be less surprisingly beautiful to Russians than to the people of the misty north. He agreed that doubtless this was so and gloomily asked her if she had been in Russia. He agreed with everything she said about his country as seen from a distance, but without interest and, presently, as if to change the subject, declared that he knew nothing of Russia and Russians.

His voice sounded again too soon to give her time to select a nationality that should soften the disappointment of losing him as a Russian, and in a moment he was talking of Italy, and the Italy she knew by so many proxies dead and living was stricken out of her mind, to give place to the unknown Italy who had produced this man, simple and sincere, gloomy and harsh-minded, playing Chopin with all his heart. But when presently she learned that he was a business man on holiday from Milan, her Italy returned to her. He was from a world that everywhere was the same, a world that existed even within Italy.

And at dinner again he sat apart wrapped in his gloom, until again Vereker was rescuing him with speech and he was responding in the withheld, disclaiming Russian way.

A Latin consciousness was, in this group, something far more remote than a Russian would have been, and she wondered what it was that behind Vereker's unchanging manner was making his half of the bridge upon which they met. Music perhaps, if Vereker, with eyes candid and not profound and not deep-set, were musical. She caught a few words. It was the weather. Do Italians discuss the weather? Was Guerini, behind his gratitude in being rescued from isolation, wondering at the Englishman's naïveté? Vereker was not showing off his French. He was being courteous, being himself. No one,

except, when he could seize a chance, the American, made any sort of parade. Nor was it that they made a parade of not making a parade. Talk with them was easy because it was quite naturally serene. No emphasis. No controversy. The emergence of even a small difference of opinion produced at once, on both sides, a smiling retreat. Deep in his soul the American must certainly be deploring this baffling urbanity. English correctness and hypocrisy. Here was the original stuff from which the world-wide caricatures were made.

And talk with these people always ended in a light and lively farewell, a manner of dropping things that handed a note of credit for future meetings. A retreat, as from royalty, backwards. A retreat from the royal game of continuous courtesy.

And together with the surprise of discovering—when having departed upstairs she was drawn down to the little salon by the sound of the Chopin ballade—not the Italian but Vereker at the piano in the empty room, was the boon of his composure. Of his being, and continuing to be after she had slipped into the room and reached a chair from which she could just see him in profile, so quietly engrossed. A little strung, as though still the phrases that yesterday he had so carefully recaptured might again elude him, but listening. Led on, and listening, and in the hands of Chopin altogether.

Seated thus exposed he was slender, delicate, musicianly, only the line of his jaw gave him an appearance of strength, and perhaps the close cropping of his hair, so that of what would have been a flamboyant mass only crisp ridges were left, close against a small skull, like Caesar's. His spruceness and neatness made stranger than ever the strange variance between the stiff, magpie black and white of dress clothes, and the depth and colour of music.

He played the whole ballade, sketchily where the technical difficulties came thick and fast, but keeping the shape, never losing the swinging rhythm.

Its concluding phrases were dimmed by the need of finding something to say that should convey her right to say anything at all, but when the last chord stood upon the air, the performance seemed to have been a collaboration before which they

now sat equally committed And when his face came round, its smile was an acknowledgment of this

For an instant she felt that nothing could fit but a gratefully affectionate salute and then a 'How's old So-and-so in these days?' after the manner of men of his type drifting happily about upon the surfaces of life And when she said 'You got the whole of it this time,' it was as if the unexpressed remainder had indeed passed across to him, as if she were the newly arrived friend whose presence somewhere upstairs had made him so radiant during dinner and afterwards sent him to pour out his happiness in the deserted little salon

'After a fashion,' he said with the little flicker of the eyelids that was his way, from sixth-form or from undergraduate days, of sustaining for further speech the pose of his turned head and smiling face 'There's no one like him, is there?'

'You were playing last evening, just after I came For a moment I couldn't believe that ballade was actually here I heard it long ago, and never since, and I've never been able to recall the theme'

'I'm so glad,' he said with his little note of distress 'I've been trying for *days* to get it all back'

For him, too, it came out of a past, and brought that past into this little Swiss room, spread it across whatever was current in his life, showed him himself unchanged And in that past they had lived in the same world, seen and felt in the same terms the things that are there for ever before life has moved So far they were kindred But since then she had been flung out into another world, belonged to the one in which he had gone forward only through an appreciative understanding of its code, of what it was that created its self-operating exclusiveness He did not yet know that she stood outside the charmed circle, had been only an occasional visitor, and that now, visiting again after years of absence, she was hovering between the desire to mask, and remain within it, and her proper business as a Lycurgan to make him aware of the worlds outside his own, let him see that his innocent happiness was kept going by his innocent mental oblivion

And whilst they called up cherished names and collided in

agreement, she wondered what these people who lived in exile from reality could find in their music beyond escape into the self for whom in their state of continuous urbane association there was so little space, and presently became aware of lively peace filling the intervals between their to and fro of words, distracting attention from them, abolishing everything but itself and its sure meaning so that into this Swiss stillness, of frost without and electricity within, nothing had been present of the Switzerland that had brought them both here, and now suddenly came back, enhanced, a single unbounded impression that came and was gone, that was the face of its life now begun in her as memory

She read her blissful truancy in his eyes, his recognition of their having fallen apart, but not of its cause, which he thought was perhaps the monotony of their continuous agreement, and was now swiftly seeking a fresh bridge that in an instant, since clearly he intended to prolong the sitting, he would, deferentially flickering his eyelids, take courage to fling

But into the little pause came the sound of footsteps approaching through the hall, and an intensity of listening that was their common confession of well-being and was filling them with a wealth of eager communication that must now be postponed until to-morrow But, to-morrow, the college friend would be in possession, there was only this evening, a solitary incident Perhaps the door would open upon someone who would straightway withdraw, leaving the way open for the waiting conversation And the college friend had come only for a few days

But this falling from grace was rebuked by the reminder of Vereker's all-round niceness He would, of course, retain the intruder If it were a man there would be three-cornered talk, enlivened by what was being sacrificed to it But with the opening of the door, as she raised her eyes towards it and caught in passing a glimpse of him upon his music stool, out of action and alone, she saw that dear and nice as he was, had always been, he could not fully engage her, was real to her on a level just short of reaching down to the forces of her nature, was pathetically, or culpably, a stranded man, subsisting

Guerini huge, filling the doorway, hesitating for a moment and retreating, quietly closing the door, but not before Vereker, wheeling round on his music-stool, had seen his departing form

It was his unexpectedness, the having forgotten him so that he came like an apparition, that had sent him away. Even so, a woman of the world would have promptly become a smiling blank and suitably vocal, or withdrawn and expressionless in the manner of a hotel guest only partly in possession of a room now to be partly taken over by another. But she had left her thoughts standing in her face, leaving Vereker, who had turned just too late, to be hostess.

Wheeling back to face her, he was again the gentle companion from the past. In his elegant sunny voice he was recalling their morning's talk, begging at once, with his despairing little frown, for more light on the subject of property in land. It was clear that these things had never come his way. It was after all not his fault that his education had held his eyes closed, that they had since been kept closed by wealth and ease taken for granted. And, in his way, he had kept fine. His adoration for his gods of art and literature was alive and genuine—and he was a sportsman. It was difficult, face to face with his gentle elegance, to remember that he was distinguishing himself in an exacting sport. Repentant of her condemnation, she set forth the steps of the reasoning and the groups of facts, saw him eagerly intent—not upon herself but upon this new picture of life, wrestling step by step with what he saw far off—and presently had the joy of seeing him see how economic problems stood rooted in the holding of land at rent. But he was only one, there were thousands of men, nice men, needing only hints, as blinkered as he.

CHAPTER IV

HURRYING through her dressing to keep the appointment that had not been made and whose certainty in her own mind was challenged in vain by all the probabilities, she opened her door upon the silent corridor, stillness and silence as if every one else in the hotel had been spirited away, leaving clear, within the strange surroundings in which for a while she was set down, the familiar pathway of her life. And, when she reached the dining-room, the sight of them there, side by side at breakfast in the brilliant morning light with no one else in the room save herself approaching, had for a moment the hard unreality of things deliberately arranged. She saw them very clearly, and it was as if neither of them were there, as if they were elsewhere each on his own path from which this tacit meeting was a digression.

But before she was half-way to the table they were rising. Their breakfast over, they were going off into their day. She was too late, her haste was justified of its wisdom. Reaching her place, she murmuring a casual greeting, turned away towards the spaces of her own day opening, beyond this already vanishing small disappointment, as brightly as the light shining in from the sunlit snow.

They halted a moment while Vereker introduced his friend to whose height, as she sat down to the table, she glanced up to meet the intent dark gaze of a man on guard. She was already far away and, in the instant of her hurried astonished return to face for the first and perhaps the last time this man who was challenging her, the eyes were averted and the two men sat down to freshly broken rolls and steaming cups.

The little self-arranged party was secure in the morning stillness that was the divine invisible host equally dear to all three. Happy in this fulfilment of premonition, she sat silent,

delighting in the challenge left, miscarried and superfluous upon the empty air, wickedly delighting in the friend's discomfort in following the dictates of the code forbidding him again to look across until she should have spoken, and confining his large gaze within the range of his small immediate surroundings. Refusing rescue, she busied herself with breakfast, enjoying his large absurdity, free, while he paid the well-deserved penalty of his innocently thwarted attack, to observe to her heart's content

He sat taking sanctuary with Vereker—who at his sunny best was making conversation, enlarging upon the trials in store—slightly turned towards him and away from the barred vista across which no doubt, before she came in, his large gaze had comfortably extended, responding to Vereker now and again, with thoughtful groans

Beside Vereker's sunburned fairness he was an oiled bronze, heavy good features, heavy well-knit frame. Lethargic, or just a very tired man on a holiday, bemused by his sudden translation. Superficially he was formidable, 'strong and silent'. His few remarks, thrown into the talk that Vereker kept up while he waited for his two friends to fraternize and admire each other, came forth upon a voice deliberately cultivated since his undergraduate days, a ponderous monotone, the voice of a man infallible, scorning argument, permanently in the right. Its sound was accompanied by a swaying movement from side to side of his body bent forward from the hips suggesting some big bovine creature making up its mind to charge.

She recalled other meetings with his kind, instant mutual dislike and avoidance. This time there was no escape. She was linked to him by Vereker, obliged by Vereker to tolerate his presence, sit out his portentousness, and be aware, since Vereker found him so very fine, of the qualities hidden within. Courage of course, tenacity, strength to adventure in strange places. Were such things enough to justify this pose of omniscience? With that pose it was for ever impossible to make terms, and if this were not a single occasion, if there were further meetings, there would sooner or later be a crossing of swords. She considered his armoury

Mentally it was a flimsy array, a set of generalizations, born of the experience that had matured him and become now his whole philosophy, simple and tested, immovable, never suspected of holding good only for the way of living upon which it was based

The fact of the existence of life had either never entered his head or been left behind in the days before he crystallized. He had now become one of those who say 'our first parents,' and see a happy protégé of an entirely masculine Jehovah duped into age-long misery by the first of the charmers. Homage and contempt for women came equally forth from him, the manifest faces of his fundamental ignorance. The feminine world existed for him as something apart from life as he knew it, and to be kept apart. Within that world 'charm' and 'wit' drew him like magnets and he never guessed their source, knew nothing of the hinterlands in the minds of women who assumed masks, put him at his ease, appeared not to criticize. And such women were the sum of his social knowledge. One day he would be a wise old man 'with an eye for a pretty face,' wise with the wisdom that already was cheating him of life.

There was no hope for him. His youth had left him Vereker, his chum whose sunny simplicity had always disarmed him, who did not resent his portentous manner. From women he would have, till old age, flattery for his strength. From his workers nothing but work, and respect for his English justice and honesty. It was inconceivable that any one should ever pierce his armour, the ultimate male density backed by 'means' and 'position.'

His pose had found its bourne in his present position of authority, his state of being bound to present a god-like serenity, and it had become so habitual that even when it was put out of action he could not disencumber himself of it. At this moment, for lack of proper feminine response from across the table, it was actually embarrassing him. To proper feminine response, charming chatter or charming adoring silence, he would pay tribute, the half respectful, half condescending interest of the giant in his hours of ease.

Unable any longer to endure silently, she rode across him

with speech, pictures, for Vereker, of her yesterday's adventure Lively and shapely, inspired by the passage of wrath Her voice had a bright hard tone, recognizable as the tone of the lively talker

She was aware of the friend accepting her as the bright hard mondaine, at once attentive, his pose relaxed so far as to be represented only by the eyebrows left a little lifted and still knitting his deliberately contemplative brow He was looking, poor dear, at the pictures, enjoying them, their mechanism, their allusions And she, for a weary empty interval, was being a social success It was a victory for the friend, a bid for his approval

Vereker was puzzled, meeting a stranger, a little taken aback But when, grown weary of the game of brightly arranged exaggerations, she relapsed into simplicity, he recovered at once and again brought forth his ski-club The friend sat by while one after another the persuasive arguments came forth, smiling with the slightly lifted brow that was now his apology for smiling at all

And suddenly he was grave, intent as he had been at the first moment, this time towards the door, outside which sounded Daphne's eager breathless voice and ceased in the doorway Her swift slight footsteps crossed the room and brought her to a standstill just in sight, gazing at the stranger

He remained grave, darkly gazing Vereker, half-risen, eager to be off, was looking at him in the manner of a hostess arrested in giving the signal for departure For a moment the man and the child stared at each other, and then she moved stealthily, rounding the table-end A light came into his unsmiling face With a rush she was upon him, mouth set, eyes blazing, clenched fists beating upon his breast

'Eaden,' she panted, 'evil, *evil* Eaden'

There was no defence, no display of comic fear, no wrist-catching dominance And when she desisted, and stood back still searching him with grave face a little thrust forward in her eagerly thinking way, he turned more sideways from the table, to attend, while hurriedly, with the air of one having other business on hand and no time to waste, she catechized him

He answered simply, with just her manner of one cumbered with affairs and eager nevertheless to contrive meetings, devouring all the time with his eyes the strange hurried little face, the round wide eyes set upon something seen afar

They had recognized each other To the rest of the party she was a quaint, precocious child This man saw the strange power and beauty of the spirit shining in those eyes almost round, almost protruding, and, if there had been in the blue of them, that toned so gently into the pearly blue surrounding, a shade more intensity of colour, merely brilliant

'You *must*,' she said, her lips closing firmly on her ultimatum, head a little out-thrust, hands behind back 'You'd better go now,' with a glance at the group that had gathered round She pattered swiftly away to her table in the background

'Daphnee'll always get what she wants with her nagging,' said the Skerry youth standing by

'She will get what she wants with her beaux yeux,' said Miriam warmly, and saw the little form panting along its ardent way up through life, seeking and testing and never finding, in any living soul

'Yes,' groaned Eaden and impatiently sighed away the wrath in his eyes set upon the departing figure of the youth Again they were lit and gentle and as if still gazing upon Daphne He sat for a moment, paying tribute to a suddenly found agreement, before joining Vereker held up at the door in the little crowd of newly arriving breakfasters

It was something like cycling in traffic, only that this scattered procession making for the rink seemed all one party The *achtungs*, of those starting on their journey from the top of the slope rising behind her, rang out like greetings, and the agonized shrieks coming up from below, as one and another neared the gap visible now in the distance as an all-too-swiftly approaching confusion of narrowly avoided disasters, were full of friendly laughter the fearless laughter of those experienced in collisions For a moment she was tempted to steer into the snow and wait

until the road should be clear But the sudden sideways swerve of a toboggan just ahead called forth unawares her first *achtung* It rang, through the moment which somehow manœuvred her clear of the obstacle, most joyously upon the air and hailed her—seeming to be her very life sounding out into the far distances of this paradise, claiming them as long ago it had claimed the far distances surrounding outdoor games—and sent her forward, one of the glad fellowship of reckless tobogganners whom now unashamed she could leave, to go along her chosen way

Ignoring yells from behind she slowed to pass the gap and its glimpse of the descending track dotted with swiftly gliding humanity, took the sharp bend beyond it, and was out of sight careering down the first slope of the valley run with sky and landscape sweeping upwards, mountains gigantically sweeping upwards to the movement of her downward rush

The dreaded bends arrived, each too swiftly, with its threat of revealing, upon the smooth length of the next slope, an upward-coming sleigh, or village children steering down at large Slope after slope showed clear and empty, each steeper than the last, and here and there a patch of ice sent her headlong, sent the landscape racing upwards until her heels could find purchase for a steadying dig and bring back the joy of streaming forward for ever through this moving radiance

The fencing was growing lower, almost buried in deep snow A sweeping turn and ahead, at the end of a long smooth slope, the floor of the valley, the end From a drive of both heels she leaned back and shot forward and flew, feet up, down and down through the crystal air become a rushing wind, until the runners slurred into the soft snow, drove it in wreaths about her, and slowed and stopped dead leaving her thrown forward with the cord slack in her hands, feet down, elbows on knees come up to meet them, a motionless triumphantly throbbing atom of humanity in a stillness that at once kept her as motionless as itself, to listen to its unexpected voice the clear silvery tinkle, very far away, of water upon rock, some little mountain stream freed to movement by the sun, making its way down into the valley She listened for a while to the perfect little sound, the way it filled the vast scene, and presently turned to search

the snowy levels, longing to locate it and catch a glimpse, defying distance, of the sunlit runnel. The mountains were cliffs upon the hither side, their shoulders and summits invisible until one looked up to find them remote in the ascended sky.

Down here at their feet was *terra firma*, broad levels on either side the windings of the frozen river that was trimmed here and there with bare trees sparse and straggling, their gnarled roots protruding through the snow that bulged its rim. A bird-cry sounded from a tree at the roadside, on silent wings a magpie, brilliant in sunlit black and white, sailed forth and away across the wastes. Birds and the tinkling runnel, the sole inhabitants of this morning solitude.

Whose magic survived the long backward climb and the run down to the rink amidst the sociable echoes of the morning's tumult, survived the knowledge that in the minds of these busy skaters it was merely the bottom of the hill, nothing to do down there, unless you were going on down to the station to meet and sleigh up with someone newly arrived.

Here on their tree-encircled rink they were together all day as in a room. Passing and re-passing each other all day long. Held together by the enchantment of this continuous gliding. Every one seemed to be gliding easily about. Only here and there a beginner shuffled along with outstretched jerking arms and anxious face. It was skating escaped from the niggardly opportunities of England and grown perfect. Long sweeping curves, dreaming eyes seraphic, even the sternest betrayed by the enchantment in their eyes. There were many of these in this English crowd. Many who knew there was absurdity in the picture of grown persons sweeping gravely about for hours on end. Only a great enchantment could keep them in countenance and keep them going on. Envy approached and stared her in the face. But only for a moment. She could skate, rather better than the beginners. In a day or two she could be sweeping enchantedly about. It was a temptation, answered before it presented itself, only presenting itself because it could move more quickly than thought to be racing about on a sled was a reckless flouting of the prescribed programme, but innocent, begun in forgetfulness. To have come

and seen, to sit and stroll about each day just seeing, would have been joy enough

But when she looked across, from the grey crowded rink with its belt of ragged bare trees, to the mountains standing in full sunlight and filling half the opposite sky, and saw, away above the pine woods ascending beyond the little bridge, the distant high white saddle of the pass with its twin peaks rising on either side—they startled her with their heightened beauty. These enchanted skaters, cooped upon their sunk enclosure, had enlivened the surrounding scene not only by bringing forgetfulness of it, but because she knew the secret of their bliss, had shared long ago the experience that kept them confined here all day.

Gliding, as if for ever, the feeling, coming even with the first uncertain balance, of breaking through into an eternal way of being. In all games it was there, changing the aspect of life, making friends dearer, making even those actually disliked, dear, as long as they were within the rhythm of the game. In dancing it was there. But most strongly that sense of being in an eternal way of living had come with skating in the foggy English frost. And this it must be that kept all these English eagerly and shamelessly fooling about on bladed feet, eternal life.

It might be wrong. Wells might be right. Golf. There must be a secret too in golf. The mighty swipe, the swirl of the landscape about the curving swing of the body, the onward march? All these must count, even if the players think only of the science of the game, only of excelling an opponent. Even in safe and easy games there is an element of eternity, something of the quality there must be in sports that include the thrill of the life-risk. Savage sports. Fitness, the sense of well-being of the healthy animal? But what *is* health? What *is* the sense of well-being?

'We know *nothing*. That at least you must admit that we walk in darkness.'

'And proclaim ourselves enlightened by awareness of the fact.'

A figure swinging swiftly up the rink, a different movement

cutting across the maze of familiar movements, drawing her eyes to follow it until it was lost and watch until again it came by clothed in uniform purplish brown, close fitting, a belted jerkin, trousers, slenderly baggy, tapering down into flexibly fitting boots. A strong lissome body that beautifully shaped its clothing and moved in long easy rushes, untroubled by shackled feet.

He was not perhaps doing anything very wonderful, just rushing easily about, in the manner of a native of some land of ice and snow. But he transformed the English skaters to jerking marionettes, clumsily clothed, stiff-jointed. Visibly jointed at neck and waist, at knees and ankles and elbows. Their skating seemed now to be nicely calculated mechanical balancing of jointed limbs, each limb trying to be autonomous, their unity, such as it was, achieved only by methods thought out and carefully acquired. They seemed to be giving exhibitions of style, with minds and bodies precariously in tune. He was style spontaneously alive. His whole soul was in his movements.

She made her way to a near bench under the trees to watch for him. Sitting there with her feet upon the ice, she became one with the skaters, felt their efforts and controls, the demand of the thin hard blade for the perpetual movements of loss and recovery. Not all were English, skating with reservations. Here a little Frenchman, with arms folded on his breast, came by as if dancing, so elegantly pointed were the swinging feet above which gracefully he leaned now forward now back. Effortlessly. In his stroke there was no jerk of a heavy-muscular drive, yet he covered as much ground as the English, and more quickly. Behind him an Englishwoman, with a bird's-wing pointing back along the side of her little seal cap, going perfectly gracefully in smooth slight sweeps, serene.

Near at hand two men practised trick skating, keeping clear the space about them with their whirling limbs. They swept about with eyes intent, and suddenly one or other would twirl, describe a circle with an outflung leg, and recover, with an absurd hop. Clever and difficult no doubt, but so very ugly that it seemed not worth doing. The stout man's hop seemed

as though it must smash the ice Between their dervish whirls they talked They were arguing Amiably quarrelling, the occasional hysterical squeal in the voice of the stout man revealing 'politics' They were at loggerheads over the house-keeping, the lime-lit, well-paid, public housekeeping, 'affairs,' the difficult responsible important business that was 'beyond the powers of women,' that was also 'dirty work for which women were too good', wrangling The stout man executed a terrific twirl and brought up facing his opponent who had just spoken He advanced upon him, bent and sliding, arms dangling low 'Just so,' he chanted amiably and, recovering the upright, presented a face really foolish, a full-moon foolishness, kindly perfection of inability to see further than his good British nose 'We're back at what I told Hammond this morning we *can't afford* to ignore the *Trades Union Secretaries*' With a swift turn he was off before the other man could respond, skating away beyond their enclosure, smiling his delight, staring ahead, with wise eyes, at nothing at all but the spectacle of his opponent caught out and squashed

The spectacle of his complacency was profoundly disquieting He was the typical kindly good-natured John Bull Gently nurtured, well-educated, 'intelligent,' ready to take any amount of time and trouble in 'getting at facts' and 'thinking things out' And he was a towering bully Somewhere within his naive pugnacity was the guilty consciousness of being more pleased in downing an opponent than concerned for human welfare There was no peace of certainty in him He had scored and was flushed with victory And all over English politics was this perpetual prize-fighting The power of life and death was in the hands of men playing for victory, for their own side

Morning and evening, in some hotel, that big man's voice boomed incessantly Behind it a kindly disposition and a set of fixed ideas No mind

'Don't you skeete?'

Making for the bench, bent forward to reach it hands first, was the younger Croydon girl, behind her the other, rallentando, balancing to a standstill

She had greeted them, ere she was aware, with the utmost enthusiasm. Smiling in their way, a gentle relaxation of the features that left them composed, they stood about her, pleased to see and greet a stranger who was also an old friend, renewing their great adventure. At the same time they were innocently rebuking her outbreak.

In her suburban past she had instinctively avoided their kind, scented a snare in their refined gentility, liked them only for the way, in the distance, going decorously in pretty clothes along tree-lined roadways, they contributed to the brightness of spring. Meeting them out here, representative of England, the middle-class counterparts, in their ardent composure, of the hotel people who so strangely had received her as a relative, she wanted in some way to put forth her claim as one who knew of old their world of villa and garden, their gentle enclosed world.

'It's glorious, we're having a lovely time,' said the younger, looking away down the rink—an English rose, thoroughly pretty in the characterless English way, shapely sullen little face, frowning under the compulsion of direct statements. Her hair, that in the train had been a neat bun, hung now in a broad golden plait to her waist, where its ends disappeared behind a large black bow like a bird with wings outspread.

And now, with one seated close on each side of her, it was with difficulty that she attended to their talk, so clearly did it exhibit their world as a replica of the one just above it—as a state of perpetual urbane association, conformity to a code in circumstances more restricted, upon a background more uniform, and searched by the light of a public opinion that was sterner than the one prevailing above. All the bourgeois philistine in her came forth to sun itself in their presence, zestfully living their lives, loving their friends and relatives, ignoring every one who lived outside the charmed circle.

One against the other, they joyously relived the short time whose sunburn had so becomingly accentuated their Blair Leighton fairness. Their stories centred round the success or breakdown of the practical jokes that seemed to be the fabric of life at their hotel—all the old practical jokes, even

apple-pie beds In and out of these stories went Mr Parry, who was presently pointed out upon the ice, a stout little dark man skating about at random, his movements visibly hampered by the burden of his sociability, his eyes turning, to the detriment of his steering, towards every one he passed in his search for prey

‘He makes us all *roar*, every evening’

There were others, some whose names and their roles, as assistants or willing victims of the schemes of Mr Parry, seemed sufficiently to describe them, and, as central decoration in the picture, these two girls newly arrived and certainly Mr Parry’s most adored recruits, ready trained by a brother in the science of practical joking, yet not hoydenish, demure and sweet and, to his loneliness, the loneliness of an undignified little man, not quite grotesque, and incapable of inspiring romantic affection, figures of romance

Growing weary of their inexhaustible theme—of waiting for the emergence of some sign of consciousness of the passing moment, a dropping of references backwards or forwards, that would leave them in league together, there as individuals—she pressed them for personal impressions of the adventure in its own right, the movement into strangeness, the being off the chain of accustomed things They grew vague, lost interest, and fell presently into a silence from which she pulled them by an inquiry about the plait

In the midst of the story of the plait and just as some people were being pointed out who still thought them three sisters, two with their hair up, and one with a plait who did not appear at dinner, came a longing to escape, the sense of a rendezvous being missed, with the scene and the time of day But her preparations for flight were stayed by their payment for her interest in the plait They plied her with questions, presently they were offering to lend her skating-boots, and choosing, from amongst the guests at their hotel, people she would like They were pitying her, thinking that she must be having a poor time and determined at once that she should do more than just stand upon the edge, sunning herself in the glow of the life they were finding so entrancing

But her contemplation of the desert that must be, from their point of view, the life of a woman obviously poor and apparently isolated, took her for a moment far away, and when she returned the link between them was snapped. Her silence had embarrassed their habit of rapid give and take. Making vague promises, she took leave, rescued by their immediate reversion to the forms of speech set for such occasions, from holding forth upon the subject of the dead level of happiness existing all over the world independent of circumstances. They would have thought her both pious and insane.

All the afternoon they had been in harmony, strolling and standing about together in the snow until there seemed nothing more to say, and after each run there had been something more to say. Till Italy lost all strangeness but its beauty, and he had seemed a simpler Michael, free from Michael's certainty that every one in the world is marching to annihilation.

And suddenly there was a wall, dividing. No more communication possible, the mountains grown small and bleak and sad and even now, in being alone upon the promontory there was no peace, in all the wide prospect no beauty.

Why was it so much a matter of life and death, for men as for women? Why did each always gather all its forces for the conflict?

If all he said were a part of the light by which he lived, he should have been able to remain calm. But he had not remained calm. He had been first uneasy, then angry, and then sorry for the destruction of their friendship.

'The thing most needed is for men to *recognize* their illusion, to drop, while there is yet time, their newest illusion of life as only process. Leave off trying to fit into their mechanical scheme a being who lives all the time in a world they have never entered. They seem incapable of unthinking the suggestions coming to them from centuries of masculine attempts to represent women only in relation to the world as known to men.'

It was then he was angry

'How else shall they be represented?'

'They *can't* be represented by men Because by every word they use men and women mean different things'

Probably Italian women led men by the nose in the old way, the way of letting them imagine themselves the whole creation And indeed the problem presently will be how to save men from collapsing under their loss of prestige Their awakening, when it comes, will make them pitiful At present they are surrounded, out in the world, by women who are trying to be as much like them as possible That will cease when commerce and politics are socialized

'Art,' 'literature,' systems of thought, religions, all the fine products of masculine leisure that are so lightly called 'immortal' Who makes them immortal? A few men in each generation who are in the same attitude of spirit as the creators, and loudly claim them as humanity's highest spiritual achievement, condoning, in those who produce them, any failure, any sacrifice of the lives about them to the production of these crumbling monuments Who has decreed that 'works of art' are humanity's highest achievement?

Daphne, preceded by her hurried voice, followed by her maid carrying a tray She came swiftly in her manner of a small panting tug, eyes surveying ahead with gaze too wide for detail

'Put it there, near the lady'

Hitching herself into a chair, she sighed deeply, but not to attract attention, nor in the manner of a conversational opening She had, without self-consciousness, the preoccupied air of one who snatches a tiresome necessary meal, grudging the expense of time Her compact stillness was the stillness of energy momentarily marking time Her face, distorted by efforts, mouth firmly closed, with a goodly bite of the stout little roll, was busily thinking and talking Continuous There was no cessation in her way of being, no dependence, none of the tricks of appeal and demand that make most children so quickly wearisome Yet she was almost a baby sitting there, a lonely infant, rotund

Her face came round, so perfectly impersonal in its gravity that Miriam knew the irrepressible smile with which she met it for an affront, felt herself given up to the child's judgment, ready to be snubbed

For a moment the round eyes surveyed her, deep and clear, a summer sea in shadow, and then, with her head a little butted forward in the way she had of holding it during her breathless sentences, she hurriedly swallowed her mouthful and cried

'You're *nice*! I didn't know!' Condemnation and approval together Scarcely daring to breathe, she waited while the child drew near, shouting for her maid, who came grumbling and departed smiling when the tables were drawn side by side

'That's-my-beecely-German-nurse-I-hate-her'

'She talks German with you?'

'She talks I don't listen She has a beecely voice Vicky Vereker says she can't helper voice, can't help being a silly stupid, and evil Eaden didn't say anything and Vicky said show him how she speaks'

'And did you?'

'I should have been *sick* Evil Eaden's gone ski-ing again Evil Eaden likes Napoleon and Vicky doesn't, he wouldn't'

'Why do you like Napoleon so much?'

'Because I like him, because he's the good dear little big one Everybody is a big silly small one almost'

Meditating on Napoleon as a pattern for womanhood, Miriam heard the returned ski-ers arrive upon the platform and watched the eager calm little face that was still busily talking, for a sign

'When I've done my beecely edjagation, when I go back to Indja,' it was saying, looking out with blind eyes across the bright intolerable valley

Vereker's voice, gently vibrant and sunny, sounded near by, and a deep groan from Eaden just visible, collapsed in one of the small green chairs

'I've got to go now,' said Daphne, relinquishing her second roll and sliding to the floor Covering the small space with her little quick-march, she pulled up in front of Eaden and stood surveying, hands behind back, feet a little apart, head thrust forward Napoleon in a pinafore

'You 're dead beat, that 's what you are '

'Daphne, I am I 'm a broken man Don't pound me
But you may stroke me if you like '

On a table at his side stood a large brown bear on ski, his gift to her, bought on his way home from the old woman at the corner and that now they were surveying together She had approached it with two little eager steps and pulled up just short with her arms at her sides, volubly talking just out of hearing, but to his delight who heard and watched her Between her sallies she sought his face, to bring him to contemplate and agree Did it please her? She had not yet handled it Could anything please her? The giver and the giving were calling forth her best, that moved him and Vereker as men are moved at the sight of life in eager operation, spontaneous as they never seem to be, commanding and leading them Vereker was amused Eaden disarmed and delighted, protective of a splendour Suddenly she seized the bear in her arms and held it while she talked and put it carefully down and looked back at it as she turned with her little quick march to someone calling from the house

'It 's all right, Daphne ' Eaden's voice eager, free of its drawl, crying out in pity and wrath He had leapt from his chair and was gathering and fixing together the detached parts, bear and ski and pole, found by Daphne returned, lying as if broken upon the table at his side She stood speechless, a little forlorn child, red-cheeked and tearful in dismay A little way off stood the Skerry youth with his grin

CHAPTER V

WHAT had brought this wakening so near to the edge of night ? The mountains were still wan against a cold sky, whitening the morning twilight with their snow

How long to wait, with sleep gone that left no borderland of drowsiness, until the coming of their gold ?

And in a moment she had seen for ever the ruby gleaming impossibly from the topmost peak stillness of joy held still for breathless watching of the dark ruby, set suddenly like a signal upon the desolate high crag

It could not last, would soon be plain sunlight

Already it was swelling, growing brighter, clearing to crimson In a moment it became a star with piercing rays that spread and slowly tilted over the upper snow a flood of rose

Each morning this miracle of light had happened before her sleeping eyes It might not again find her awake But it had found her awake, carried her away in a moment of pure delight that surely was absolution ? And when presently the rose had turned to the familiar gold creeping down to the valley it was more than the gold of yesterday In watching its birth, she had regained the first day's sense of endless time To-day was set in advance to the rhythm of endless light

To-day was an unfathomable loop within the time that remained before the end of Eaden's visit, his short allowance that added, by being set within it, to her own longer portion His coming had brought the earlier time to an end, made it a past, expanding in the distance And beyond his far-off departure was a group of days with features yet unseen Looking back upon that distant past, it seemed impossible that the crest of her first week was not yet reached

Yet the few days that seemed so many had already fallen into a shape Morning blessedness of leisure, smiled down

upon by the mountains again tawny in their sunlight, witnessed to by every part of the house wandered through, rich sense of strength unspent, joy of mere going out again into the wide scene, into the embrace of the crystal air, the first breath of its piny scent, of the scent of snow, and presently the dry various scents confined within the little street, messengers of strange life being lived close at hand, the morning dive into the baking warmth of the post office, to find, amongst the English vehement at their pigeon-holes, the sharpest sense of being out in the world of the free, then the great event, the wild flight down to the valley's sudden stillness

The afternoon with Guerini, but, after yesterday, there might be no afternoon with Guerini freedom instead, for fresh discovery until tea-time, on the promontory, in the midst of unpredictable groupings Sunset and afterglow, high day moving away without torment or regret, the mountains, turning to a darkness in the sky, telling only of the sure approach of the deep bright world of evening

The gold-lit evening feast was still momentous, still under the spell of the setting, the silent host who kept the party always new

And it was in part the setting, the feeling of being out of the world and irresponsible, that last night had kept Eaden a docile listener He had heard a little of the truth, at least something to balance the misrepresentations of socialism in the Tory press But he had heard in a dream, outside life Sitting on the stairs, huge in his meek correctness of evening dress There was, to be sure, in face of Vereker's determination, nothing else for him to do But it was with one consent that they had all three subsided on the wide stairs, secure from the intrusions that menaced the little salon

And it was only for a moment she had sunned herself in the triumph of being claimed, forcibly enthroned, in the sustaining blue gown, upon the red-carpeted stairs with the best of the hotel's male guests a little below on each side of her After that moment there was only effort, the effort to make things clear, to find convincing answers to Vereker's questions

And there were no witnesses, only Guerini, coming from the

salon and apologetically past them up the stairs, and the maids, passing to and fro

There is no evening social centre in this hotel, no large room That is why these sports-people like it The day is concentrated within the daylight The falling away after dinner is a turning towards the next day's work

That Grindelsteig hotel must be rather fascinating She thought I shared her disapproval of people 'running up and down balconies and in and out of each other's rooms all night long' I did Yet they are only carrying out my principles

She despises even those who come out for sport, unless all day they are risking life and limb So fragile and brittle-looking, so Victorian and lacy, yet living for her ski-parties with picked people from the other hotels, going off at dawn, swallowed up until dinner-time and then, straight to bed

The social promise of the first evening has miscarried The social centre is the Oberland Ski Club, the rest, a mere putting in of time I am living on the outskirts, looking for developments in the wrong place, have seen all there will be to see until the end of my stay

Into the golden sunlight fell the clashing of morning sleigh-bells, describing the outdoor world Listening to them she felt the vast surroundings, that lately had become a setting owing part of its entrancement to the delightful sense of success in a charming social atmosphere, reasserting themselves in their own right, accusing her of neglect, showing the days winding themselves off to an end that would leave her in possession only of the valley road and the fields beyond the bridge

The dawn had wakened to remind her Watching the coming of the light, she had been restored to her first communion with it, back in the time when the people downstairs had seemed superfluous, thrown in with the rest When all was over they would appear in the distance bright figures of a momentary widening of her social horizon, unforgotten, but withdrawn into their own element, not going forward into her life as this winter paradise would go forward, brightening her days with the possibility of reunion

This morning she would break the snare, be a claimant for a

lunch packet, an absentee for the whole day With the coming of the far-off afternoon, Guerini, looking down from his window on to the promontory either to escape or to claim her company, would find no one there

Even in terror there was gladness of swift movement that left her pressed like a niched effigy into the wall of the drift as the beast pranced by, revealing in its wake a slouching peasant, clear brilliant eyes brooding amidst unkempt shagginess, pipe at an angle of jaunty defiance to the steep his heedless tramping brought so near

She was honourably plastered with snow, and the precious package that had leapt and might have hurled itself into the void was still safely on its string about her neck, but the narrow rising path, bereft of its secrecy by evidence of homely levels above of field and farm, was perhaps only a highway for humiliating perils More cows might be coming round the bend, a whole herd There might be—it would harmonize with the way life always seemed to respond to deliberate activity with a personal challenge—on this very day the dawn had drawn her away from beaten tracks, a general turning out of cattle for an airing, mountain cattle, prancing like colts

Man and cow were now upon the widening path, approaching the sloping field with the barn at the end, the cow trotting swiftly ahead, through the half-buried posts beside the sunken open gate, and now careering hither and thither about the meadow with flying tail, the powdery snow flung in wreaths about its course It was half mad of course, poor thing, with the joy of release from one of those noisome steamy sheds whose reek polluted the air surrounding them and saddened the landscape with reminder of the price of happiness oblivion of hidden, helpless suffering

But in summer-time this air-intoxicated captive would stand knee-deep in rich pasture, mild Its colouring was mild, soft tan and creamy white, in ill-arranged large blots, and with its short legs, huge bony mass of head and shoulders from which

the spine curved down as if sagging beneath the weight of the clumsy body, it missed the look of breeding, the even shape and colouring of lowland cattle. Its horns, too, had no style, rose small and sharp from the disproportionate mass of skull.

Almost without warning, so slight in the dense pine wood was the sound of its muffled gliding, the sled was upon her, heavy with piled logs and a ruffian perched upon them slithering headlong, fitting and filling the banked path from side to side. Somehow she flung herself upon the root-encumbered bank, somehow hitched her feet clear of the sled as it rushed by. The villain, unmoved and placidly smiling, had not even shouted.

'No time to shout, no use *shouting*,' she murmured breathless, smiling at the absurd scene, a treasure now that danger was past, a glimpse into local reality. But danger was past only for the moment. This pleasant wide path she had mistaken for a woodland walk winding and mounting safely amidst the peace of the pine woods was a stern highway, almost a railway, formed like a railway to the exact dimensions of its traffic.

Intently listening, going swiftly where the sides of the track were too high for an escaping sprawl, she toiled on and up and came presently to a gap and a view of the small hut, seated clear of the pines, high against the pure blue upon the curve of unblemished snow, come down now nearly to her level and revealed as a chalet with burnished face, inhabited above its chimney the air quivered in the heat of a clear-burning fire.

The hotel lunch, opened upon the trestle table, looked pert, a stray intruder from the cheap sophisticated world of to-day into these rich and ancient shadows. The old woman, but for her bell-like, mountainy voice, was a gnarled witch moving amongst them, unattained by the cold light from the small low windows, that struck so short a way into the warmly varnished interior.

And it seemed by magic that she produced the marvellous coffee in whose subtle brewing was a sadness, the sadness of

her lonely permanence above the waste of snow and woods—old grandmother, a living past, her world disappeared, leaving only the circling of the seasons about her emptied being

In this haunting presence, the triumph of distance accomplished, the delicious sense of known worlds waiting far below, world behind world in a chain whose end was the far-off London she represented here in this high remoteness, could not perfectly flourish, came in full only when the silence had had time to fill itself with joy that was too strong to be oppressed by the departed ancient voice, that was like the echo of a sound fallen elsewhere

Again, recalling the far-off morning, a dark barn-like room But the woman opened a door at the end of it, led the way through a passage still darker another door and she was out upon the edge of the world, upon a dilapidated little grey balcony jutting over an abyss As far as sight could reach were sunlit mountain-tops range beyond range, till they grew far and faint

Faced alone, the scene, after the first moment's blissfully ranging perception, was saddened in its grandeur through the absence there of someone else perceiving Thousands, of course, had seen it from this perch in the centre of the row of slummy little balconies But so splendid was the triumph of the unexpected mountains ranged and lit that no company, even exclamatory, could break their onslaught Alone, there was too heavy a burden of feeling in the speechless company of this suddenly revealed magnificence

The woman coming out with the tea that one day she must take here accompanied, was brisk about the view an adjunct, thrown in gratis with her refreshments which were good and which presently caused the mountains, turned away from, to be felt preparing a friendliness, becoming the last, best reward of her day's accomplishment

The way home, down and down and across the levels to the rink and up the little homely slope into Oberland, would be a

jog-trot taken half asleep to the haven of things small and known amidst which she would sit renewed, to-day's long lifetime stilled to a happy throbbing of the nerves, a bemused beaming in the midst of friends Its incidents blurred that would come back one day clearer, more shining than all the rest ?

Warned by a growing chill, she turned to face the mountains in farewell and found them lit by the first of the afterglow Far away in the haze beyond the visible distance a group of slender peaks showed faintly, rose-misted pinnacles of a dream-city from whose spires would presently gleam the rubies of farewell

CHAPTER VI

THE solitary excursion had made a gap in the sequence of days. Those standing behind it were now far away, and yesterday had failed to bridge the gap and join itself to their serenity. To-day looked shallow and hurried, with short hours beyond it rushing ahead to pause in the sunlight of the ski-fest and then to fly, helter-skelter towards the end.

Eaden's departure was helping time to hurry. In the distance, it had promised to leave things as they were before he came. But now that it was at hand it seemed a sliding away of everything.

There was no depth in the morning light.

She turned to survey the scene on which it fell and saw the early gold stealing faithfully towards the valley. Once Eaden had gone, this thinned-out urgency of time would cease. For every one but Vereker his going was only a removal of something grown familiar, a reminder, soon forgotten, of the movement of time. Slight reminder. He reflected only surfaces and was going away, unchanged, to reflect the surfaces of another shape of life.

Yet last night he had talked. Had been less a passenger unable to take root. It was he who had been the first to subside on the stairs—with a groan for his hard day's work. Perhaps the approach of his known life had given him a moment of clairvoyance, showing its strangeness, the strange fact of its existence.

Last night had been good, was showing now how very good it had been. Three friends glad to sit down together and presently talking, each voice transformed, by the approach of the separation that would make it cease to sound, to the strange marvel of a human voice. Everything said had seemed important in its kindness, and, though there had been no

socialism he had talked at last of his peasants and his ceaseless fighting with their ancient ways as though he wished to excuse himself from accepting socialism, to point out its irrelevance to the life of peasant and soil

Industrial socialism had bored him. He thought its problems irrelevant, raised by clever doctrinaires who had nothing to lose. She had failed him by standing too much in one camp. The proper message for him came from the people who saw land as the fundamental unit.

Tell him to look away from capital and wages. And read George. And the Jewish land-laws, never surpassed.

'Good-bye. Please remember that work is an unlimited quantity.'

Then she remembered that this morning there would be a meeting at breakfast. He and Vereker would be there together as on the first morning, with time to spare.

But going into the dining-room she found his departure already in full swing. He was talking, smiling across at Mrs Sneyde and Miss Hollebone with the eagerness of one who finds at the last moment the ice broken and communication flowing the more easily for having been dammed up and accumulating.

Sitting down unnoticed except by Vereker, she presently heard Maud Hollebone, to whom he had scarcely spoken, arranging, across the width of the room, to hasten her departure.

They were going down to Italy together, as casually as guests, leaving a party and finding that their way home lies in the same direction, will share a hansom across London. To travelled people, a journey to Italy was as simple as crossing London. Was even a bore, a tiresome experience to be got through as pleasantly as possible. Behind her manner of sonsy, quietly boisterous school-girl indifference Maud was pleased, but still kept her poise, her oblivious independence—of what? On what, all the time going about with Mrs Sneyde, neglecting all opportunities for recognizing the existence of the house-party, aloof without being stand-offish, was she feeding her so strongly rooted life?

She was pleased, of course, to be carrying off as her escort

the imposing oiled bronze, now almost animated as he crossed to the little table to discuss details and stood, a pillar of strength, at the disposal of the two ladies now looking so small and Mrs Sneyde, as she fired remarks at him, so scintillating. She, no doubt, had her ideas and thought it an excellent plan. But the sister already knew too late that it was not. Had felt the project change during his approach with his week's happiness all about him, and realized now that she represented a reprieve, was to be, by keeping Oberland before his eyes during part of his long journeying, an extension of his holiday.

Standing at close quarters, already accustomed to her companionship, he was aware, behind his animation, of sacrificing for the sake of it the precious silent interval between his strenuous idling and the arduous work ahead; was paying the price always paid for tumult half-consciously insincere. The finding of Maud also immersed in the business of departure, and therefore seen in a flash of time as a comrade, had enlivened him as one is enlivened by a greeting without regard to the giver of it. That enlivening glow had already departed and he was left reduced, with its results upon his hands.

It was settled. The elopement arranged and he, with his instructions, moving off to clear her path. Perhaps secretly he was pleased after all. Perhaps his life in the south was not a flight from society and he was glad to be ever so slightly back again in its conspiracy to avoid solitude. Glad to be walking again on those sunny levels where there is never a complete break-off and departure. Never a void. Where even sorrow and suffering are softened by beautiful surroundings.

Their windows, she reflected as Eaden, meeting the Le Mesuriers at the door, was halted for farewells, even their hotel windows, give on to beauty. And they can always move on. And soul-sickness, the suffering of mind so often a result of fatigue and poor food and ugly surroundings, was rare amongst them. They were cheerful and amused. If bored, they shift on and begin again. If bored by the life of society itself, they remain within it and cut figures as cynics.

'It's only fair to warn you,' Maud was crying from her table, 'that I'm a vile fellow-traveller. Hate travelling.'

She rose and wandered to the window behind her table
'You 're going to take away our property?'

Here she was, the unknown Miss Hollebone, close at hand,
flopped in a chair, schoolgirlish

'Rather!'

Here in this warm circle was the old freemasonry of school-fellows, two profiles slightly turned, abrupt remarks, punctuated by jabbings at ink-stained desks, the sense of power and complete difference in relation to a stuffy old world, sudden glances, perfect happiness. Happiness that kept both quite still, hearing, feeling, seeing, in a circle of light suddenly created, making possible only slight swift words in whose echo one forgot which had spoken, which was which.

'What are we to do?' They faced each other to laugh
delight

'Don't know. What we really want is *your* socialism in *our* world. The socialist ways you have in your world without knowing it, because you know no other ways.'

'You don't object to us?'

'Good Lord, no! But just to cultivate you would be to go to sleep as you are all asleep.'

'You a Londoner?'

'Till death us do part.'

'Lucky dog!'

Eaden was at her elbow, to whom she turned with a guarded brightness, slipped back into her own world, into the half-conscious conspiracy of avoidance. Orderly world. A pattern world, life flowing in bright set patterns under a slowly gathering cloud.

Its echoes followed Miriam into the deserted little salon. Through the open door she heard a coming and going in the hall that at this hour should be empty and eloquent of people spread far and wide in the landscape. The bright pattern was flowing into a fresh shape, flowing forward in its way, heedless of clouds, heedless of the rising tide. On the little table was Daphne's bear on ski, immortal.

And now in the hall the sound of her, demanding. Drawn to the door, Miriam saw Vereker taking the stairs two at a time,

immersed in friendship And Eaden arrested in the middle of the hall by Daphne up-gazing with white determined face
‘Look at me,’ she was saying, and his down-bent face lost its smile

‘You’re not to go,’ she said swiftly, in a casual tone, and then breathlessly, still searching his unmoved face, ‘You’re not to go’

‘That’s right, Daphne,’ cried Vereker pausing on the stairs
‘Make him stay for the Fest, he wants to’

Eaden watched her while she waited for Vereker’s footsteps to die away, watched her in frowning concentration while her voice came again, the voice of one who tells another’s woe
‘Not for the Fest, but because, if you go away, I shall die’

Miriam turned swiftly back into the room, but she had seen the pain in his face, seen him wince Daphne on her last words had taken a little impatient step and stood averted with clenched fists, and now their voices were going together up the stairs, hers eagerly talking

She made ready to go out amongst the mountains standing there in their places as for countless ages they had stood, desolate, looking down upon nothing

A door opened at the far end of the corridor, and Vereker’s footsteps came swiftly trotting, went by and paused at a door further down Maud Hollebone’s, at which now he was urgently tapping A few words at the opened door and he had returned A moment later came Maud, swishing along at a run for more discussion

Her thoughts turned to the promontory within easy reach But it would be absurd to sit about, visibly hung up by the bustle of events that were not even remotely her events It was too late to do the valley run and walk back before lunch

‘I shall *die*’ Who was comforting Daphne? No one No one could Somewhere outside she was disposed of, walking with her nurse, uncomforted

She peered into Daphne's future, into the years waiting ahead, unworthy of her

Vereker's door opened again, letting out the returning Maud, coming back to go on with her packing, to talk to Mrs Sneyde. The two of them, surrounded by the opulence of wealthy packing, talking, skipping about in talk of family affairs, and in both their minds Maud's journey to Milan with the mild and foolish bronze

When the footsteps had passed, she went out into the corridor and across the space of sunlight streaming through Mrs Harcourt's door open upon its empty room. Far away in the landscape, with those people from the Kursaal, Mrs Harcourt was forgetfully skiing, knowing nothing of all this bustle

But Maud's door, too, was set wide. Her room deserted, neat and calm as Mrs Harcourt's. Where was Maud?

From the room beyond came Mrs Sneyde, dressed for outdoors, brilliant in green and gold, turning, coming forward with laughter and an outstretched restraining hand, suppressing her laughter to speak in the manner of one continuing a confidential talk, laughter remaining in her eyes that looked, not at the stranger she addressed for the first time, but away down the passage

'I've just,' she whispered, 'been in their room tyin' up Daphne's finger. Cut it on one of their razors. The poor things were terrified. Had her sittin' on the table with her finger in a glass of water.'

'No. It's nothing, but those two great fellows were gibberin' with fright. She's a little demon. Two towels on the floor. One all over chocolate and the other bright with gore. They wanted to fetch old Stick-in-the-mud.'

'What a tragedy for Mr Eaden's last hours.'

'He's not goin', stayin' for the Fest. Nobody's goin' but the dear Skerrys.'

'Didn't know they were going.'

'Nor nobody else. Till Ma suddenly began about her luggage. Wants to save the sleigh fare. Vereker's arranged it,

the luggage is goin' by the Post and they 're toboggannin', can't you see them? "Whee don't ye see goodbee to Daphnee?" says she to Tammas'

Cruel, a little cruel

'They found out a good deal about the peasants'

'The *peasants*? The village desperadoes? *Is* there anything to find out about them?'

'The lives they lead'

'Tammas been tryin' to convert them? With his weak eyes? Through his smoked glasses?'

'You know he smashed his glasses?'

'He would'

'Yes I heard his mother scolding him on the balcony and he slowly trying to explain, all in that low tone, as if they were conspiring'

'In an enemy camp They were like that if you spoke to them We all tried, but by the time they'd thought and begun to answer, you'd forgotten what you said'

'I suddenly remembered some glasses I'd been advised to bring They seemed astonished and suspicious and yet eager "Try them on, Thomas," she said'

'Tree them on, Tammas I hear her'

'And yesterday he handed them back jammy round the edges I thought he was tired of them They said nothing about going But he told me about the peasants'

'They had jam teas, on their own, upstairs'

'Anyhow, they got in touch with the natives'

'I ain't surprised Natives themselves'

'With the people in the chalet behind'

'Old Methuselah? Not difficult if you smash things The old boy mended Daphne's watch Of course she went in to see him do it Went in jabberin' German which she *won't* talk with Frederika Was there an hour till I went to fish her out Couldn't see her, my dear—couldn't see *anything*, smoke, like a fog, couldn't *breathe* Made her out at last squatting close up to the filthy old villain on his bench Lost, in the insides of watches She's goin' to be a watch-maker now'

'It must be his son '

'Who must?'

'The one Thomas told me of A woodcutter Terrible
In the snow It's only on snow they can bring the wood
down from the higher places Someone bought a high copse,
cheaply, because the higher——'

'Higher you go, the fewer—now I know what that means

'The cheaper Over two hours' climb from here, somewhere
across the valley And the men and sleds must be there by
daylight '

'Poor devils!'

'Yes And the horses for the climbing must be fed two
hours before the start Sometimes they have to feed them
before three in the morning One lot of men was caught up
there by an avalanche, and were there four days before they
could be got down '

'A1-eee, don't tell us '

'At the best it's dangerous work They get maimed,
lose their lives All the winter this is going on We don't
read their papers, don't know the people and don't hear
of it '

'Isn't it just as well? We can't help it '

'It ought to be done some other way Men's lives ought
not to be so cheap '

'How did Tammas get all this learning?'

'Speaks German '

'Jee-roozlum!'

'And French '

'And Scotch And having no one to talk Scotch to, talks
to the peasants, about their trees Daphne *hates* the trees '

'*Hates* them?'

'Would like to make a big bonfire and burn 'm all up '

Miriam was silent, searching the green eyes for Daphne

'Yes, that 's Daphne She 's mad about Napoleon Reads
all the books Has 'm in her room I have to expound when
she gets stuck Won't say her prayers till we 've read a bit of
Bony Won't say "Make me a good girl" Says "Make me a
man and a sojer" She and Eaden are as thick as thieves

He's an angel to her I've got to be *hoff* Goin' to the
Curseall for lunch Maud's there She's goin' south to-
morrow with the Chisholmes'

'Before the Fest?'

'Chisholmes have got to pick up their kid somewhere
Maud's had enough of Switzerland for this year'

CHAPTER VII

THE clouds were a rebuke, for being spell-bound into imagining this bright paradise inaccessible. The world's weather cannot be arranged as a conversation with one small person. Then how did the rebuke manage to arrive punctually at the serenest moment of self-congratulation? As if someone were watching.

She looked levelly across the sunny landscape and the clouds were out of sight. But there was a movement in the air, a breeze softly at work ousting the motionless Oberland air.

She walked ahead, further and further into the disconcerting change. Everything was changed, the whole scene, reduced to homeliness. She caught herself drooping, took counsel and stiffened into acquiescence—'I might have known. I'm accustomed to this. It removes only what I thought I couldn't give up. Something is left behind that can't be taken away'—and heard at once within the high stillness the familiar sound of life, felt the sense of it flowing warmly in along the old channels, and heard from the past in various tones, amused, impatient, contemptuous 'You *are* philosophical.' Always a surprise. What did they mean with their 'philosophical'? The alternative was their way of going on cursing, missing everything but the unfavourable surface.

Someone has said that there is nothing meaner than making the best of things.

The clouds made soft patches of shadow upon the higher snow. Beside the angular sharp shadows growing upon the northern slopes they were blemishes, smudgy and vague. But free, able to move and flow while the mountains stood crumbling in their places.

The clouds were beautiful, slowly drifting, leaving torn shreds upon the higher peaks.

Upon the ridge beyond the cloaked silence of the little wood the breeze blew steadily from across the levels—that were strangely empty, no sign of moving specks making for the further ridge. Hurrying along the track, she recalled too late the slightness of the information upon which she had built her idea of the golden scene, the gay throng, herself happily in the midst.

Without a single clear idea of the direction, she had trusted to the bright magic to draw her to itself.

The subtly changed air and the melancholy clouds re-stated themselves, became the prelude to disaster. The increasing wind and the cloud-bank hiding the distant mountains were proclaiming the certainty of punishment well deserved to wander at a loss and miss the Fest.

She glanced at her afternoon in retrospect, aimless walking in a world fallen into greyness and gloom, into familiarity that was already opening the door to the old friend, at whose heart lived a radiance outdoing the beams shed by anticipation over unknown things.

But all the time the ski-ing which now she was not to see would be going forward, mocking her until she could forget it, until the hours it filled should have passed into others bright enough to melt regret.

Climbing the rise beyond the levels, she was at once climbing up to find the Fest, would plod the landscape until she found it, late, but still in time to share and remember. She reached the crest beyond the rise—there it was, a small shape, like an elongated horseshoe, upon a distant slope. Black dots close-clustered in a strange little shape upon the wastes of snow, defying the wastes of snow.

There was plenty of space. Gaps on each side of the track and even towards the top of the rise, where people were grouped more closely about the comforting, the only festal sign, looking like an altar with its gold-embroidered, red velvet frontal. Nothing could be seen behind its shelf but a small hut upon the levels that extended backwards until the pine woods began with the rising mountain-side.

Where to stand? Up amongst the connoisseurs to see the

start, half-way down with a view of the ski-ers coming, or at the bottom of the row amongst the black-clothed natives standing about in scattered groups in the loose snow

Choosing a place half-way down, she became one of the gathered crowd of Oberland visitors lining the smoothed and steeply sloping course. They were all there. The black and distant dots had become people in every fashion of sports clothes, standing on skis, sitting on toboggans, stamping about in the snow, walking up and down, and all waiting, all looking betweenwhiles expectantly up the track towards the deserted altar. There was a good deal of talking. Here and there the incessant voices of men who make a hobby of talking. But most of them talked intermittently, in the way of these leisured English who veil their eagerness as they wait, half apologetically and wholly self-consciously, for a show. There, patiently they would wait, good-humoured, not deigning to be disturbed, not suffering anything to disturb their pose of amused independence that looked so like indifference and masked a warmth.

Just across the way was a stout lady in a sealskin coat and curiously different snow-boots. She sat sturdily bunched on her toboggan and they stuck out in front of her, close-fitting, the rubber soles curving sharply to the instep and neatly down again into the shape of a heel. She clasped a camera and her sallow heavy face was drawn into a frown that remained there while she turned towards a voice sounding from over the way.

‘and we ’ll just be *here* till judgment *day*’

‘I was told,’ she answered at large, with face upraised, deep furrows from nose to chin giving strength to her hanging cheeks, ‘I was to see sky-jumping, but I see no men on their skys to jump’

American continuousness held up in Europe, brought to despair by the spectacle of tolerance.

Sunlight had gone, and on the slope of the breeze small snow flakes drifted down to the snow. For a while it seemed as though the gathering in the white wilderness were there in vain.

From the group of black figures at the top of the rise a deep Swiss voice sang out an English name. Heads were craned forward, but the altar remained empty. The confronted

figures were transformed Each life, risen to gazing eyes, waited in a stillness upon the edge of time

The knickerbockered, tweed-clad form arrived upon the shelf from nowhere, leaped, knees bent and arms outspread, forward through the air upon the long blades that looked so like thin oars flattened out, came down, arms in upward-straining arches, with a resounding whack upon the slope and slid half-crouching, gaining the upright, fully upright with hooked arms swinging, at full speed to the bottom of the hill, went off in a wide curve and was stopped, swaying, just not falling, in wreaths of whirling snow

Achievement Thrilling and chastening Long ago, someone had done this difficult thing for the first time, alone, perhaps driven by necessity Now it was a sport, a deliberate movement into eternity, shared by all who looked on She felt she could watch for ever Cold had withdrawn from the snow and from the drifting flakes One after another the figures appeared at the top of the rise and leapt, making the gliding race to the sound of cheers that now broke forth each time the forward rush followed the desperate dive For those who crashed and rolled, slanting ski and sloping helpless body rolling over and over down the slope, there was comment of laughter silly and cruel Yet one man sliced his face with a ski-point, and one had lain stunned at the bottom of the slope

Vereker came at last, looking very young and lightly built, leaping neatly and far, and gliding, easily upright, to the accompaniment of frantic cheering, at a splendid pace down the slope and far on into the loose snow and round in a sweeping curve that encircled a distant sapling and left him up the track half-hidden in a cloud of churned-up facing snow

He was the best Length of jump, pace, style The best of the English And kind life had led her to him for speech, for the recovery of shared things, and was making now more memories that fitted with the rest

Ski'd on-lookers were planking sideways up and down the course, flattening it Snow still fell thinly The distant mountains were lost in mist The forgotten scene was utterly

desolate Warmth flowing forth from within made a summer in its midst

'Tsoor-boo-chn!' The strong spell-binding peasant name filled out the ringing cry Switzerland was coming, bringing its so different life of mountain and pine wood, its hardy strength, perhaps to outdo the English in this brave game

Here he came, in black against his snow, deep velvety black against the snow, gliding past the little hut with a powerful different gait It was partly his clothes, the way they seemed all of one piece, closely fitting, without angles And his size, huge From the edge of the shelf he leapt high into the air and seemed to stand there against the sky, in a dream Down he swooped, sailing, dreaming, to the track, rose smoothly from the terrific impact and smoothly went his way

What could be more beautiful? He was heavy and solid, thickly built But with his shapely clothing and smooth rhythmic movement he made the English graceless and their clothes deliberately absurd

All the Swiss, though some were rough and ungainly, moved with that strong and steady grace But Zurbuchen was the best It was he who would live in her memory, poised against the sky like a great bird

'You took photographs?'

'For him,' smiled Vereker with his quizzical affectionate glance 'To remind him of what he has to do next year But we'll share them Yours will remind you that next year you won't be let off' Eaden remained silent and expressionless

'They will look strange amongst your cypress groves'

'They will look passing strange'

'You will come out again?' She wanted neither to know nor to seem to want to know, but Vereker had left him there for a moment on her hands She was caught in the social trap Expected, being a woman, not to walk off alone, but to wait and provide, while she waited, suitable entertainment, some kind of parlour trick For a moment it seemed as though he would not answer He was silent and used to stillness, yet

embarrassed now by stillness in the presence of a perceiving witness. Another woman would not seem to perceive. Would have given her question the semblance of sincerity.

'No,' he said suddenly. 'If I go away at all next year I shall go east.'

'When you've 'eard the East a-callin' ' She turned to look towards the returning Vereker. Eaden gazed away towards the snowy distances. He was taking his farewell. To-morrow, he would be gone back to his chosen isolation, uninfluenced. Tender-hearted lover of brave souls, of Daphne, and who yet would bring so little to his love-making. He stood in his heavy silence, heavy man's silence of waiting for recognizable things.

'Yes, that man knew what he was talking about.' Suddenly his friendly beam and a forward approaching step, a turning away, at the first hint of something he had heard before, from his formal preoccupation, preoccupation with a glimpse of the next break in his unknown southern life. She had nothing more to say. Vereker was at hand who had held them at truce together. But now, without Vereker, they were at truce, the only kind of truce he could understand.

For a moment she was aware, far away in the future, of one of whom he was the forerunner, coming into her life for mortal combat.

CHAPTER VIII

IN spite of her contempt for tobogganing she was going warily, slowing up a little at the bends, a gnome in an extinguishing cowl, Mrs Harcourt, carelessly carrying her long past and the short future that so strangely she regarded as indefinite, looking forward, making plans for next winter with eager schoolgirl eyes, carelessly bringing the life she carried about with her down to the valley this afternoon with brusque camaraderie, her day-time manner

Her company added something to the joy of flying through the backward-flowing landscape But it was shortening the run and fitting it within reduced surroundings—making it show as it showed to her within her larger scale of movement

Here already was the steepest bend of the run, with the patch of black ice across its middle Mrs Harcourt had passed it safely and disappeared It was past and a group of people came into sight midway down the next slope two figures, pushing off, and Mrs Harcourt at the side of the track, dismounted, beating her skirt She had collided, managed to run into them, a collision and a humiliating smash

‘Fools! Fooling all over v’ place Had to slam into v’ side’

‘A blessing the fence is broken just here’

‘Not their fault I’m not smashed up I was yellin’ for all I was worth’

‘It’s *really* dangerous when you can’t see what’s ahead Someone said tobogganing accounts for more accidents than any other sport’

‘Don’t wonder, with so many idjuts about Where’s Daphne?’

‘Held up, poor little soul A broken cord, just as they were starting, the maid went in for another’

‘Paw kid She’ll be too late No good waiting’

They mounted and sped off, one behind the other, through a scene that was now the child's vast desolation. In place of joyous flight, selfish, in which Daphne had been forgotten, came now this absurd urgency to arrive. Mrs Harcourt felt it. She was sorry, in her kindness, for Daphne's disappointment, but saw nothing of the uselessness of arriving without her. Thought of nothing but herself, her determination, her hatred of being beaten. This made a shelter. Under the shelter of Mrs Harcourt's determination to be there because she had said she would be there it was possible to be seen rushing uselessly to the last farewell.

Another bend. Beyond it a sleigh coming up and Mrs Harcourt carefully passing it and the other tobogganers drawn up in the snow. It was safely past. Mrs Harcourt was getting ahead. Going recklessly. Even for her, there was something more in this desperate urgency than the mere determination to arrive.

If she, too, were to arrive it was now or never. Now, at once, in the midst of this winding ice-patched roadway, she must give herself up to what she had learned on the safe snow-fields and never yet dared to try here, until the last clear slope was reached. Lifting her feet to the bar, leaning back to swing free and steer by weight, she let herself go. The joy of flight returned, singing joy of the inaccessible world to which in flight one was translated, bringing forgetfulness of everything but itself. Bend after bend appeared and of itself her body swayed now right now left in unconscious rhythm. The landscape flew by, sideways-upwards, its features indistinguishable. She was movement, increasing, cleaving the backward rushing air.

At the last slope she was level with Mrs Harcourt, safely, triumphantly returned to the known world, passing her, flying down so blissfully that arrival would now be nothing but an end to joy. Flying down towards two small figures standing on the level, turned this way, watching up the incline down which speeded, superfluously, absurdly, just these two women.

'Where's Daphne?' said Eaden in his rich, indolent voice, looking over their heads, staring up the slope.

While Mrs Harcourt's deep bass, still staccato with her anger,

told the brief tale, she watched the pain and wrath in his face, strong man's sympathy of pain with this child to whose spirit he gave homage, anger with those who had deserted her. Her useless explanation flickered about him unspoken, silenced by the pain she shared.

'It's no good, old man,' said Vereker gently, watch in hand 'we must be off.'

Formal hand-shaking. To Mrs Harcourt's padding of sociable remarks he paid no heed, keeping his eyes still above her on the bend at the head of the slope until he turned to tramp off with Vereker, to the sound of Vereker's kindly, sunny voice.

'Paw kid Eaden was frightfully wroth. Thought we ought to have brought her.'

'I couldn't have dared, down those slopes, on a small single,' said Miriam wearily. But the judge within stood firm. She had not thought of trying.

The now distant men were marching swiftly, reaching the point where the road sloped downwards, had reached it and were settling on their toboggans. A face came round. Miriam looked back up the slope still cruelly empty, and round again to see the men seated, gliding off, lessening. Their caps vanished below the level of the ridge. And now the upward slope held a single small toboggan coming headlong. Daphne had made the run alone.

'How dare you let him go?'

Miriam moved forward surprised by her own approach. Her mind was filled with the simple selfish truth. The wrath-blazing eyes saw it, recognized her for what she was, and turned away to the wastes of snow.

'Eaden, my Eaden. I shall *never* see him again.' Tears flowed from the wide eyes and swiftly down the face so little convulsed by grief that bent her, standing there with arms sideways out as if to save her from falling, to keep her upright, facing her loss, fists clenched to fight her woe. Of themselves Miriam's arms reached forth to stay the torment.

Incredibly Daphne was clinging, sobbing with hidden face. 'Do you love me—do you love me?' She held her without speaking, silenced while still the broken voice went on, by the

sense of being carried forward into a world known only by hearsay and that now was giving forth all about them in the stillness its ethereal sounds—sounds she had sometimes felt within a gentle wind

Daphne's head was raised and her flushed face busy in eager speech as they went forward together over the snow. When presently she assured her that one day Eaden would come back, the child pulled upon her arm and spoke in a new way of her new love. She spoke no more of Eaden, walking sturdily uphill, eagerly talking, sunned for a while in humble helpless love that soon must be removed

With Eaden's departure holding Vereker away until to-morrow, and Mrs Harcourt disappeared upstairs with all those who sought sleep and early rising, the hotel was empty, strange again and going its independent way as on the day of her arrival. The presence of Guerini, hidden away in the little salon where daily he had spent his unimaginable evening of a Milan business man on holiday, increased its emptiness, made it as desolate as the world of his thoughts

He must have learned something in seeing her evening after evening—not in the least goloshy in her blue gown of many colours—seated on the crimson stairs between the two Englishmen, in seeing discussion prevail over personalities, new world for him of men seeking, without sentimental emotion, without polite contempt, conversation with a woman. Had any light dawned in him? Would he show any grace of dawning light?

She went into the little salon and there he was, rising to greet her, with the look of a man penned within an office, the look upon his low Italian brow of worry left over from his daily life. He looked common too, common and ordinary—she wondered now that she could ever have mistaken him for a musician wandered from Russia. But beside the pathetic appeal of his commonness, supporting it, was the appeal of his disarray, his obvious gladness and relief, like Michael coming back after a last, final explanation and dismissal, saying impenitently 'You

whipped me yesterday, to-day you must not whip ' He was extraordinarily like Michael in his belief in the essential irrelevance of anything a woman may say

It was his last evening in Oberland, and the first time they had found themselves alone together since the afternoons in the snowfields that were now so clearly in his mind as he stood still turning over those hopeless little old Swiss books, but turned towards her as she ensconced herself in the chair from which so long ago she had watched Vereker at the piano Yet their life together had gone on The grim little room was full of it

Again she had that haunting sense of being a collection of persons living in a world of people always single and the same Mrs Harcourt, she reflected, as she said the books were like faded flowers, was fastidiously selective and always one person, one unfaltering aspect Vereker, Eaden, all the others Yet the lives she lived with each one were sharply separated lives, separable parts of herself, incompatible The life she lived with Guerini, beginning unconsciously that first evening when he had turned upon her throughout dinner his brown stare, hurrying forward during their afternoons in the snow, ending with their quarrel, begun again with the reproachful gaze he had sent across the table on the evening of her truancy, had persisted during the intervening time and was now marching off afresh on its separate way

It was clear that these close questionings held not only the remains of his surprise over the nature of the things that had separated them, but also his determination to try to see these things as she saw them They revealed much pondering, not over the things in themselves but over their power with her, and presently it was clear that he meant to see her again She sat ensconced, considering him, measuring the slow movement of his thoughts, the swiftness of the impressions he was drawing from his attention to every inflection of her voice

She knew she ought to go, that she was building up, with every moment she stayed in the room, a false relationship The cordiality of her voice, its dreamy animation, was not for him nor made by him It told its tale to her alone His talk

of London had taken her thoughts there and she saw it afar, vivid with charmed and charming people. For the first time, she was seeing London as people whose secret had revealed itself during this last two weeks, and was at this moment beginning consistently to live her life there as in future it would be lived, as she had lived it, but unconsciously and only intermittently, during the past year.

This man appealed, she realized it now, from the first to a person who no longer existed, to a loneliness that during the past years had been moving away from her life. It was only in its moving that she had realized its existence. This man saw her still as lonely and resourceless, and also as interesting, something new in his narrow experience. He too was lonely, had an empty life, in the busy business man's way of having an empty life, no centre and a lonely leisure. And he was more than half bent on offering her the chance that so often in the past had been at her elbow, of pretending herself into a single settled existence, a single world, safe. Even now it was a temptation. But it was the Italian background that was the real temptation. As soon as he talked of settling himself in London, he was lessened, and the temptation disappeared. Life as a single conversation in a single place, with the rest of the world going by, might seem possible when thought of in all the newness of Italy. In London it at once fell into proportion and became absurd.

In London was Hypo, held up, at any rate saying he was held up, and not now so much awaiting her decision as taking it for granted. A big shadow, that might turn into sunshine. A gleaming shadow that lost its brightness as she faced it. And, behind it, a world that perhaps took most of its glamour from this uncertain shadow.

CHAPTER IX

It was an urgent tapping on the wall from Mrs Harcourt's side, and she was speaking as she tapped. With half-opened eyes, Miriam grew aware of darkness, half-darkness of early morning, and listened through the companion darkness within her of the knowledge that this was her last whole day, to this strange clamour from the lady whose nightly presence at her side had been for so long forgotten.

'Look out of ve window!'

Sitting up in bed, she saw hanging in mid-air just outside the window a huge crimson lamp, circular in a blue darkness. Sleepily she cried her thanks and leaped awake to dwell with the strange spectacle, the gently startling picture, in its sudden huge nearness, of the loveliness of space. The little distant moon, enormous and rosy in blue mist, seemed to float in the blue as in blue water, seemed to have floated close in sheer unearthly kindness, to comfort her thoughts, on this last day, with something new and strange.

The day passed with heartless swiftness, savourless. Full of charms whose spell failed under the coming loss.

CHAPTER X

AND, for the last morning again, a strange surprise Mountains and valley hidden behind impenetrable mist, and even the nearest objects screened by the thickly falling snow Alpine winter tremendously at work, holding her fascinated at windows downstairs, upstairs, mighty preparation for the beauty of days she would not see, robbing her of farewell, putting farewell back into yesterday's superficial seeing which had not known it was the last

But when she was forced to turn away to her packing, she found, within the light of this veiled world that cast within doors a strange dark brilliance, something of the London gloom, and the enjoyment of a concentrated activity that had always been one of the gifts of a London fog It was as if already she were translated, good-byes said and the journey begun The hours ahead became a superfluous time, to be spent in a Switzerland whose charm, since London had reached forth and touched her, had fallen into its future place as part of life an embellishment, a golden joy to which she would return

And when she saw the guests assembled at lunch in full strength, it was as though, having left them for good, she returned for a moment to find them immersed in a life to which she was a stranger Confined by the weather, they had produced the pile of letters waiting in the lounge and were now rejoicing in unison over the snowfall In speech and silence each one revealed himself, but as a dream-revival of someone known long ago, and in the dream it was again as on that first evening when she had sat a listening outsider, fearing and hoping to be drawn in, and again it was Mrs Harcourt who, when her association with these people was seeming to be a vain thing cancelled, drew her in with a question

The short hour expanded Once more she was caught into the medium of their social vision, into the radiance that would

shine unchanged when she was gone and was the secret of English social life and could, if it were revealed to every human soul, be the steering light of human life throughout the world. These people were the forerunners, free to be almost as nice as they desired.

And then, with the suddenness of a rapid river, her coming freedom flowed in upon her, carrying her outside this pleasant enclosure towards all that could be felt to the full only in solitude amongst things whose being was complete, towards that reality of life that withdrew at the sounding of a human voice.

It was already from a far distance that, alone with her upon the landing, she promised Mrs Harcourt remembrance and letters, said good-bye and saw once more her first diffident eagerness, felt that it was she, withdrawn since the first days, who had yet lived her life with her, transferred something of her being into the gathered memories and would keep them alive, keep the mountain scene in sight near at hand.

Alone in her room, still thinking of Mrs Harcourt, she remembered from *Ships that Pass in the Night* how on the last day all but one person had forgotten the departing guest.

Then in getting up from lunch she had seen them all, unknowing, for the last time—as yesterday the mountains. For all these people hidden away in their rooms, immersed in their own affairs, she was already a figure slid away and forgotten. With the paying of Frau Knigge's bill, her last link with the Alpenstock had been snapped.

But when the coach-horn sounded and she went down into the hall, there they all were, gathering round, seeing her off. Hurriedly, with the door open upon the falling snow and the clashing of sleigh-bells, she clasped for the first time strange and friendly hands, saw, in eyes met full and near, welcome from worlds she had not entered. Beside the door she met Daphne forgotten, who clutched and drew her back into the window-space for desperate clinging, and entreaties lest for this new, slow-witted lover the searching gaze not be enough.

It was not until she was inside the dark coach and its occupants had thanked heaven she was English and let down

window, that she remembered Vereker. He alone had made no farewell

The coach pulled up outside the post office and there he stood, in the driving snow, and all the way down the valley she saw them one by one, and saw him standing in greatcoat and woollen helmet, heard his elegant light distressful voice begging her to come out next year

And brighter now than the setting they had charmed was the glow these people had left in her heart. They had changed the aspect of life, given it the promise of their gentle humanity, given her a frail link with themselves and their kind

She climbed into a carriage whose four corners were occupied and sat down to the great journeying

‘History repeats itself’

Looking up, she found all about her the family from Croydon, met the father’s quizzical brown eyes

‘Had a farewell kick-up at our place last night. We’re feeling the effects. *You* look very fit. Enjoyed yourself?’

‘I’ve had a splendid time’

‘You collared the handsomest man in Oberland anyhow—that young giant of a Russian’

‘Italian’

‘Bless my soul! Hear that, Doris?’

‘We were up till *fave* this morning,’ said Doris

The train moved off, but only Doris, once more grown-up, with her hair in a staid bun under her English winter hat, turned to watch the station disappear

‘Want to go back, Doris?’

‘Ah love,’ she breathed devoutly, ‘could thou and aye with feete conspire——’

Miriam joined the sister in intoning the rest of the lines

‘Ah Moon——’ began Doris, and the brother leaned forward, holding towards her a gloved hand whose thumb protruded through a fraying gap

‘A little job for you in Paris’

She regarded it undisturbed and turned away the scornful sweetness of her face towards the window and the snowflakes falling thickly upon the shroud of snow

DAWN'S LEFT HAND

TO
VIOLET

CHAPTER I

HE had said *the* train, as if there were no other. It must be the one great train of the night, the Paris train, that was to be an hour late.

'Confound it!' she said fervently into the darkness in the manner of a travelling Englishman faced with delay that to her was nothing but reprieve, a whole extra hour in Oberland. Of which a fraction must be spent in carrying the news to the group still standing in the lamplight at the far end of the platform, meekly.

She sped along, feeling the sharp air expand once more limitlessly across the snows to which she had said farewell, and began speaking, as soon as they were near enough to hear, in the freemasonish Oberland way of addressing strangers as if they were old friends. They turned their three heads as she reached them on the end of her communication, but absently, as if being interrupted, and showing that they had heard only by turning again towards each other, and that they were not of the Oberland world by consulting in murmurs.

Two small women, shapeless with wraps, and a man rather tall and with a customary importance in his bearing, but standing with the women in an equality of sincere attention towards the discussion.

She waited a moment, not to miss the chance of a belated response, yet when she turned away was glad of their negligence that set her free to attend only to the mountain air.

But her spirit turned out to be already in London, refusing to come back to the enchantment of which it had taken leave and watching, as she went, for the lit opening of the waiting-room, and presently welcoming the sound of following footsteps.

They sat down on the far side of the room, a party of conspirators. Speculating towards her, towards the fact, pathetic

or improper, of her sitting there alone at midnight since she attacked strangers so freely, improper

She felt them pitiful, living suspiciously outside the world of universal urbanity, and turned to the nearer wall-posters glaring in the half-light, for response to the jovial remarks that rose in her mind their imagined cheerful sound making perfect the spectacle of the cautiously murmuring group

The man was crossing the room Aloof and graceless in a stout top-coat, he demanded whether she were going through to London, and at once went away with her answer, and the murmuring began again

Contemplating without looking at them and yet unable to escape the spectacle without either closing her eyes or gazing at the floor or ceiling, it seemed to be in the very person of Mr Orly, seated at the lunch-table in the bare-walled basement room at Wimpole Street where the confronted lunchers were, beyond the dishes on the table and the unvarying lights and shadows made by the electric light, the only external refuge for unpreoccupied eyes, that she gazed upwards and mentally emitted his humorously despairing sigh, glancing at the same time sideways-down at herself seated at his right hand and just growing aware of the meaning, for him and from his point of view, of one of his kindly sarcasms, and yet obstinately set against admitting any justification for it, desperately refusing to show any sign of awareness and choosing rather to appear idiotic, and justify his sigh, than to give him the satisfaction of seeing her look 'rather sick'

She remembered saying to Michael in a voice almost trembling with indignation 'One *moment* of my consciousness is wider and deeper than his has been in the whole of his life' And the grave conviction of Michael's 'most-certainly,' made all the more comforting by the way the note of shocked amusement in his voice had suggested that the warmth of her statement was waste of emotion

And now the statement itself seemed meaningless Monstrous It was not true that Mr Orly's consciousness was less deep and wide than hers but simply that like all true Oberlanders he was unconscious of his consciousness Had been

trained away from it. A kind of salvation. But what is the use of an unconscious salvation? Insecure. Depending upon being always surrounded by an unvarying world.

When at last the sounds outside announced the train that would set going again the unsuspecting movement of life, the little group of conspirators followed her on to the platform and she found, turning round from hoisting her things into the rack of her chosen compartment, the smaller woman within the carriage and her friends, taking leave from the platform, audible as New Englanders with quiet, unsmiling voices.

The train started, carrying her and the small woman off together into the long night. In spite of the meagre promise, she found herself back within the warmth of shared life. Flowing through her, it gave eagerness to her hands as they attacked the fastenings of her coat whose removal was part of the prelude to a social evening.

Perhaps the woman did not mean to talk. But even if she were silent, her presence would keep the whole world in the carriage.

She had turned away from the window and its view of the departing platform and now, with head bent to unfasten her neat veil, fell into speech as if her farewells had interrupted a conversation already set going. Miriam hurried her preparations to be seated and at leisure, hearing for the present little more than the quality of the woman's speech, the wide New England vowels that always reminded her of sounds heard long ago, she could not tell where, and being confirmed in her first impression of the group on the platform by the way the inflections of her voice had been subdued, by the life she had led, almost to a monotone. It came forth, without emphasis and without colour, from the world in which she lived, a world that had never been made strange to her by any sort of astonishment over the fact of its being there at all. The very way she took off her wrappings seemed to say that every one had the same clothes, and the same way with their clothes.

She came to the middle of the carriage and sat down under the central light to attack her boots, a small, shrivelled woman all grey, grey cardigan and neat grey skirt, grey hair, sallow

thin face and faded eyes, expressionless. A fading life. As she moved about the carriage making her preparations for the night, her movements were lissome but had exactly the same expression as her speech. Wonderful to watch. But she would have laughed, if she could laugh, at the idea of their being wonderful to watch. She was following the set shape of her life with a sort of uninspired gusto that had nothing to do with the unique quality of the passing moment. Did not seem to know that moments were passing and her life passing. Her uniformly unsolitary life of the transatlantic spinster, enclosed in uniformity even when she was travelling in Europe.

She finished her discourse with her preparations, and neatly composed herself for sleep on her side of the carriage without good night. The world, hidden under a neat grey rug.

Miriam's attention dropped backwards away from her across the brief conversation to which she now heard her own voice contributing warm eagerness that of course the little grey woman had not found attractive because it was centred, not upon the items, but upon the prospect of getting away behind items. She took refuge with the two left behind at Berne to go on with their enchanting task. Why did not English teachers have a sabbatical year, go abroad and lose themselves in strangeness and come back renewed? Why not every one?

Already the little woman was asleep. She slept through the night and until the early grey began, announcing Paris at hand, and when Miriam moved to raise herself through the worst of her fatigue before the voice should begin, it sounded at once. Easy words speaking her way of being, describing her way of coming from the depths of sleep full-grown at once into her level way of life. Driving away, in advance, the sound of the stillness and the light, the richness of the gold that would follow the morning grey, and all the beauty of remembered Paris. To this woman, Paris would be only Paris, in whatever way she had of perceiving it, not a part of something hidden within herself and suddenly revealed.

She talked undaunted by groans and irrelevant statements, as if reciting a fluent stream of well-worn words dying unconsidered into each other. Miriam's own voice breaking forth, as

movement restored her strength, in staccato English, sounded, in comparison, like song. Urbanity was failing at its first test. She wanted to silence this woman and attend to all that was being driven away. Yet each time she spoke, she knew she was carolling her own advantage of youth and high spirits over one not yet alive, and already too far down life's hill really to live.

They were ready to leave the train now slowly moving through Paris grey in mist. The little spinster was unmoved in becoming surrounded by Paris. Yet only a few months ago she had seen Paris and London for the first time.

'Didn't you find London very small and flat?'

'*Mercy*, no.'

She had spoken almost warmly, and went on to explain that this time she meant to see all over England before going home for her marriage in June. The train stopped. But neither that nor her astounding announcement made any break in her discourse.

Meekly Miriam followed the bride-to-be out into the morning twilight of the great station, where she looked smaller, older. But over herself and her neat belongings played a golden radiance from her far-off destiny.

Paris was breakfast in the station hotel, and a drive to another station and the finding of another train. But again, prevailing over the ceaselessly talking little woman, the charm of it, lying all about her in the busy daylight, challenged the mountains, as it had challenged before she had seen them, and won. And the little woman at her side, intent on her uniform world, was part of the prevailing.

And when they parted in the blackness of Newhaven, she felt bereft. For a moment she stood still in nothingness beneath the sky so strangely large and empty. Just behind it the mountains were hidden. They filled her eyes, but only for an instant, leaving her alone upon the airless lowlands.

CHAPTER II

FOR these three, the time she had spent living out in Oberland a golden life within her life, had been just a fortnight of dark London days leading towards spring. Each morning they had come unenviously downstairs to find again, behind the small disturbances and adjustments that disturbed them so little, their sense of untroubled everlastingness. Helped by the warmth of their clear fire that always looked wide, in spite of the narrow, villa grate.

Its glow brightened the frosty sunlight coming in above the little hedges of dense snowy-white lace set along the lower halves of the windows and giving the heavy curtains each side the small bay their rich warmth.

They were all eager to go on with their experiences, backwards, from last night's story of the return journey, into the life preceding it. At leisure. There it all lay, represented by her presence. Awaiting the time when every one should have been carefully provided. Meantime, the to and fro of needful words, the sight of their morning eyes, fresh and dark in their familiar faces, the long, good moments into which flowed the refreshment of their rich serenity, deepened this morning by their sense of entertainment ahead.

They were eager, not through insufficiency but because of their sufficiency that survived Florrie's hopeless engagement, Grace's wrecked romance and Mrs Philps's large experience of 'trouble,' unchanged.

And yet, she reflected, taking in the new, plain wallpaper upon which their heavily gilt-framed, old-fashioned pictures stuck out with an uneasy prominence, with its narrow, gay frieze of sunlit landscape, they particularly liked 'to march with the times.' But only because within all times, however new, they found what already they possessed, over which time

had no power Yet this morning they were a fortnight older than when she had seen them last, a fortnight nearer death, of which they always spoke with grave horror and dilated eyes

But she could imagine each one of them recovering at the end, with a secret, unseen smile of surprise, behind the externals that in the deaths of others so horrified them, this unassailable happy serenity of being of which they were so unaware and that made the background of life in their company a single continuous moment troubled only now and again by the remembrance of their unconsciousness of its perfection

Her experience was passing over to them They were up amidst the sunlit snows, meeting her friends, realizing them in their direct, changeless way, making allowances for her enthusiasm, yet loving it, welcoming each word and seeming to be waiting for her at every point of her journey through her so different life As if prepared for each experience in advance, and yet seeming not to see, as they accompanied her into a life that for them was new and strange, how very strange was any life at all

Perhaps it was just their unquestioning acceptance that made life flow from them so strongly that most of her friends seemed, by comparison, uncreated In some essential way In the way the innocent Croydon family and the innocent people at the Alpenstock had made them seem uncreated And yet these uncreated friends would dispose of these three and of the Croydoners and Alpenstockers in a single generalization

Wandered too far into the contemplation of incompatibles that was the everlastingly disturbing background of social life, she felt the threads of her discourse slipping away and looked across at the row of little villas on the other side of the road, the unchanging outposts of her life in this secluded room, and found them *changed* And turned back to the table to finish the picture of the ski-contest with the magical strangeness of the villas before her eyes within the background of the scene she was contemplating Behind the black-clothed figure of the bird-man, poised, with out-flung arms moulded by close-clinging, soft black sleeves from shoulder to glove, for a second against the sky's brilliant blue above the glistening snow-slope,

was the vision of these little houses, that once had seemed so sharp in outline, blurred to softness by the English air so that their edges seemed actually to *waver* upon it

The excitement of the discovery of their new individuality broke into her voice, enlivening it as she finished her sketch, so that the three listeners were the more moved by what they were seeing, sharing her emotion, without knowing that it arose from the recognition of the gentle mustiness, even in bright sunlight, of English outlines

Strange and delightful that this simple discovery should be so moving as to seem in itself enough as a result of foreign travel and should go on, while the general to and fro of remarks was assailing her attention, wrapping her in a happiness that thrilled through her voice which was now claiming her attention for its own quality grown strange sounding the gentle south of England, the west country, too, perhaps, of her family's origin, and the large-gardened, uncrowded south-western suburbs—as so often, before, she had heard it sound here in the alien north, where voices grated even at their gentlest and bore, for all occasions, a bared and cutting edge, but without recognition of its essentials beyond the flattering assurance that she herself belonged to a superior, more cultivated way of being, the way of being that amongst the Oberlanders had been all about her and of which at this moment she was being aware as clearly as of the misty English villas as it made, on her behalf, within the inflections of her voice, statements clearer than any spoken words, enchanting and delighting her as she was delighted and enchanted by the people she loved, giving her a thrilling certainty as to the unseen future, shaming her into the knowledge that in her case they were unjustifiable, that she had grown level with almost none of them, and yet lending their quality to every word she spoke

Returning, she looked forth at strangers still radiating delight, still sounding their alien voices and making hers sound in response and again proclaim itself a barrier and yet the vehicle of her everlasting communion with them, of her prevailing with them by virtue of the echo within it of the way of being from which it had come forth

They were hovering now between their desire for more talk and the pull of the shape of their day. The freshness of the breakfast hour was over, the scene drawing to its end, each member of the party moving away into the depths of her secret, separate existence. Her own claimed her, to the new gay undertone that presently in the open she would hear more clearly.

And going down into town for her delayed luggage she heard it everywhere. In every one about her was hilarity, deep-seated, in every one moving in the open, though not on holiday. It was there even in the worried and the sorrowful, the creator of their worry and their sorrow.

Inside the clangorous great station the secret joy palpitated in the exciting, metal-smelling air like the beating of wings. It emanated even from those who were setting out, deedily, only for suburbs, and reached and transformed every hideous object within their sight.

Joy is eternity. Eternity is joy. In railway stations and in trains people enter perforce their own eternity. So that men, even when faced with disaster, so long as they can move from place to place and get away into eternity, are commonly more cheery than women, though unaware of what it is that makes them so.

In Oberland the eternal being of woman is an escorted procession. Its men are trained to pay homage to the giver of life and the pain-bearer. They seek eternity in the Services, in hobbies, in art or science, games. And never consciously find it. Their bondage to the womanly woman is a life-bondage, to eternity personified.

The jingling hansom was carrying her back to her London, filled with people to whom the golden eternity had been just fourteen 'ordinary' days and who, knowing nothing of the change in her that at present seemed to be everlasting, would endanger and perhaps destroy it. She wished she could hand them, like a certificate, at least her record of social success. They would misinterpret. Amongst them all only Hypo

would understand. He would say, to demonstrate his insight, 'You've been flattered, my dear, by kindly people at loose ends, to the top of your bent. You're a little drunk with it all. I'm not objecting to that. Good for you, good for everybody, once in a way,' and, having protested, begin his own subtle, but still quite obvious flattery, for his own ends. But he would understand that discovery about oneself is impersonal, as well as personal, like a discovery in chemistry.

Piecemeal, everything piecemeal. What Oberland had been, apart from people, no one would ever know. Yet its beauty had entered into her for ever, its golden glow must surely somehow reveal itself. It lay even over the nauseating, forgotten detail of Flaxman's now rapidly approaching.

The cab drew up at the mouth of the court. At number two, Perrance filled the doorway, one of the wings of his grime-stiffened cape brushing the jamb as he slouched through on his way to his basement. The unchanged sights of the court seemed, as she entered it, to re-open the door just slammed by Perrance, to deny her absence and promise speedy obliteration of her memories and destruction of her renewed strength.

Together with the reek pouring from the opened door, came the rebuff of the narrow staircase up which the weedy cabman might refuse to carry her luggage. Her mind turned away from this difficulty. Beyond it, waiting for her upstairs, was not the Flaxman life grown unendurable, but renewal and continuation of the golden glow.

Turning from the door to the empty court, she met the blue-eyed friendly glance of a neat working-man, not a Flaxmanite, seeming, as he responded without a word to her confident question and went about her business serenely, as if it were his own, the first of a procession of friends emerging from the future.

Selina was out. But the rooms were filled with the dry, sweet fragrance of mimosa. Once, only once, she had told Selina that the scent of mimosa in a wintry room said, each year, that life is summers. Selina had missed her, was offering from her side of the curtain that for so long had seemed the embodiment of their incompatibility, this tribute to their early days.

A pile of letters Tributes to Oberland, to Oberland past and her return to London accomplished But alone up here she had no sense of return The memories accumulated since she landed were like a transparent film through which clearly she saw all she had left behind, and felt the spirit of it waiting within her to project itself upon things just ahead, things waiting in this room as she came up the stairs To open all these letters and drop into communication with the lives they represented would be to divert its course

Graceless she felt, ungrateful, and could not care Even Hypo's thin grey envelope failed to bring the usual electric shock It stood out from the others only because her detailed response to it preceded perusal With planned cunning, he had chosen this moment for one of his concentrated attacks, the obvious moment, the wrong moment, showing him as he was alone in himself, far-off, irrelevant to personal life And, except for her annoyance with his planned persistence, she felt him stand, compared with the vast strange promise within, in an equality of indifference with all these others It was only, she thought, as she sat down to open his letter, with the unlocated being of these people that she desired communication and not at all with the sight and sound of their busy momentary selves

'Welcome to your London, my dear I'm more in love with you than ever'

When she reached the small interwoven capitals forming the signature she felt herself returned from flight, unawares, towards a far distance and felt the strong beating of her heart quieten before a vision of this shapely device, so deftly continuing and completing the design of the written lines, set down, in a kind of sincerity, beneath innumerable documents such as this

He was 'in love' in his way, once again But behind the magic words was nothing for her individually, for any one individually And his brilliance, the mental qualities she had hitherto found so full of charm, had somehow, unaccountably,

become overshadowed. She no longer felt the importance of trying to find forms of expression for alternative interpretations of his overpowering collection of facts. She felt at this moment that any interpretation was preferable to his and no plan at all better than even the most workable of plans born of the assumptions science was helplessly forced to make. He was offering a stone, a precious stone, but there might be bread waiting hidden in the world whose approaching distances seemed no longer filled only with queer irregular people who held most others in scorn.

She flicked the card, whose wording he had already forgotten, between thoughtful fingers—momentary purpose and plan, converging upon what she had seemed to be a fortnight ago. Supposing a kindly Philistine, with a fixed world and almost no imagination, were in his place? Impossible. Breathlessly impossible. Philistines or intellectuals—is there no alternative? Nobody, nobody. She wanted nobody she already knew. But did she wish him away? Or even averted? Only for a while forgotten. And that he could be, since he was fixed, in his place, far away.

Sure of possessing the immediate future, clear of obstacles and with the golden glow undimmed above it, she turned to the other letters and found amongst them one from Alma which somehow she had passed over. The sight of it drew all the rest together, making them seem like the various flowers of a single bunch and rebuking, as if it were a living presence, her desire to escape from their friendly challenges. She hesitated before submitting herself to the always strange, strong spell of Alma's written words, that already in advance were charming and rousing her with their veiled appeal from someone who was neither quite the Alma she had known in girlhood, nor the Alma who humorously fitted herself into an adopted summary of human existence.

When the torn flap of the envelope revealed the graceful hurrying script, she felt herself set down beyond release within the pattern of the life she had left behind on the far side of eternity. Gay, affectionate greetings sailed, bearing down her protests, across the page.

'And, my very dear, tremendous doings We 're invading your London, next week We 'll do a Wagner, you and me and Hypo '

Not from the past and representing it, but from the golden future and heightening its glow they came to her as she imagined the impersonal sitting down together, before a large stage made vast by outpouring music, of the three equally reduced to silence and committed to experience whose quality could not be stated in advance

CHAPTER III

ABOVE the shoulder of the parlourmaid announcing her from the doorway, she saw Densley standing at his table reading a letter, preoccupied, making use of spare seconds. And though not a patient, she felt again, as she had always felt on first entering the subdued light of this quiet room, a weakening of her scepticism before his specialized knowledge, and an uncomfortable sense of the ceaseless procession of stricken men and women, trustfully, one by one, crossing this space of floor between door and chair to learn the worst or, at the best, to be reminded that death is waiting and their span of years at the longest only a small number.

But as the maid withdrew and she came forward, the room whose door closed softly behind her was just the room that held his intimate lonely life. And he was once more only his friendship, an everlasting friend standing there in silhouette against the long window-blind yellowed by the sunlight it was keeping out.

At his best, tall and slender, in profile, with head bent so that the whole of its beautiful line, starting from the base of the neck and abruptly disappearing beneath the rounded edge of vigorously sprouting curls to appear again in the curve of the venerable small bald patch, was clearly visible, embellished by the outstanding close-cropped curls breaking into its shape. Newly cropped, and gleaming in the dim light. Very fresh and neat he looked, furbished up for the spring, very serré in the new grey frock-coat whose tails in an instant would perform their dervish-whirl as he swung round and came with outstretched arms to take her by the shoulders and get in the first words, and smother her response with his avalanche of laughter.

But he remained motionless, though now she had nearly reached the victims' chair. If he were really absorbed, she had read into the carefully casual wording of his summons an eagerness he did not feel. She recalled him hunched over his table, throwing down his pen and coming to meet her half-way across the room, talking into the telephone and murmuring a greeting for her the moment it became his turn to listen. This deliberate postponement of his welcome was new. Pretending to be engrossed in his letter, he was reminding her that her life was but one amongst the many he scanned day by day. And whilst this silent statement checked her eagerness to be congratulated and rejoiced over, he was accumulating advantage that would make his pounce the more effective when it came.

But if he were going to refuse to be a flattering mirror for her joy, this visit would turn into a continuation of a conflict of which she had grown weary. This should be the last time. Never again would she waste her golden leisure in fruitless discussion. This progress across the well-known room was the prelude to farewell. Glancing away from him towards its further space, she became aware of a deep peace and her eyes returned to him. Still holding, as if he were alone, his tranquil pose, he was waiting for her to recognize this peace as the reality beneath their differences.

With a pang of guilt she remembered her impulsive, too-affectionate letter from the Alpenstock promontory. It was on the strength of that letter that he was daring this test. The living peace in the room was like a light that seemed to flow towards them both from the corner that formed a triangle with him where he stood and herself where she stood, or to flow from each of them and meet exactly in the corner towards which at their different angles they both faced.

But there was nothing surprising in that. Any two souls could meet if only sometimes they would be silent together and wait. She ought to have known that his Celtic soul would be aware of this. But it would be unfair to let him travel too far in imagining an atonement that did not exist. Yet even as these thoughts flashed through her mind she was regretting

the passing of the strange experience of sharing with him an instant of eternity and, in order ever so little to recall it, she banished thought and resisted the further movement that would bring her too near to be ignored and saw, with her eyes on his quietude, the perspective of their friendship open, claiming its place amongst the memories laid up in this room of the years of her London life

Saw him again as the unknown Great Man serenely produced by Eleanor Dear from her diminishing stock of 'influenchoo peopoo' summoned and coming, a tall handsome saviour in dress-clothes, to her sick-room at midnight, tired and harassed, gently talking and questioning and writing, ignoring the friend in the corner until suddenly he insulted her and her beloved London night-streets by asking, without troubling to look at her, whether she were equal to going out and ringing up a chemist And her first visit, as Eleanor's agent, to sound him before she cast her desperate net over Taunton And, as a single occasion, all the sittings, in this room, over Eleanor's difficulties and the business of rescuing Taunton, secretly, under the shadow of Harley Street, under the threat of death, not lifting until Eleanor was provided for away from the brightness of lives still unthreatened

And all their meetings and conflicts all over London, since the day she had lectured him, with Veresaief's *Confessions of a Doctor* as text, on the inevitable ignorance of the high priests of Medicine, and all his kindly human sympathy with her Socialists and Anarchists and Suffragists and his belief that their hold on her was only a makeshift

'Glad to be back, dear-girl?' he murmured thoughtfully

'I'm not back yet, still much more there than here,' she said, smiting at his preparedness to sit down and state her experience in what he believed to be its right proportions, drawing her out with questions and greeting her answers with head thrown back and mouth wide for his indrawn laughter—its final gasp bringing him forward to smite her knee and make his comments and wait, eyes still filled with laughter, for her to share his mirth at her expense Not one word of enthusiasm should he have, nor anything that might give him food for amusement

Still remaining ambushed behind his letter, he flung out, as she advanced, an arm that found and gently shoved her into the confessional chair whence nothing was visible but the tall screen hiding the place of anxious disrobings, his littered table and himself, in profile against the high oblong of screened sunlight swinging round with a single swift movement to face her, seated, long grey-trousered legs elegantly crossed, crease going to the devil spats a *pink* moss-rosebud, a grave, tired face surveying her as though she were a patient, a new patient

He was quite innocent, tired and London-worn, emerging with grave simplicity from preoccupations that made havoc of his grandeur, accentuated the dreadful rosebud more completely than would the debonair manner that perhaps he had worn an hour ago

'Whose wedding have you been to?' she asked cruelly, through her pity that condemned as monstrous the demand that he should turn aside from his exacting affairs to pay tribute to her festivity

Mentally she added silk hat and light gloves and set him amongst guests thronging to the reception, saw him play his part, a lightly, musically moving figure of benevolence, radiating, as she had seen him at Socialist gatherings they had visited together, the kindly humanity most of the Lycurgans possessed only as a dogma with which to bludgeon their opponents

True democracy, the ruling of everybody by their best selves, was more readily to be found amongst the Oberlanders than amongst professed Socialists? And here, to her hand, was a topic that would represent her experiences, give him the key to them in a way that would rob him, if by chance this present gravity were assumed, of what he was secretly chuckling over in advance, and startle him by putting his own case better than he had done in their many battles, and also, by making it one with hers, demonstrate the truth in both and his own one-sidedness

'I've been to no wedding, my dear'

This was the low, pitying tone he used when she failed to

be moved by some specially 'moving' human drama selected from his day's experiences

He looked away, towards the writing-table, took up a paper-knife and thoughtfully tapped the table's polished edge

'Then why so glorious?'

She smiled, to cover her failure to approve, but with averted eyes, so that she might no longer see the pink rosebud soften his good looks with its dreadful prettiness. Perhaps it didn't. Perhaps the intolerable effect was produced by apathy, by the weariness he was not trying to conceal, spring weariness after his too arduous winter.

Their voices sounded together and she threw away the beginning of her hopeful topic to attend to his meditative voice—the Celtic shape of its tone, the first two words on one middle note, then one two notes higher with a curve in its course that brought it two notes lower than the opening words, then ding-dong up and down, the last drop curving up at its end as if to redeem statement by giving it the form of courteous question, but to-day the persuasiveness, that always made his words seem spoken from the sure ground of belief, was not there, the end of his sentence fell sadly amongst the bright echoes their many meetings had left in this corner of the room. She heard the slithering discouraged soft fall of the paper-knife upon the table and looked up and found him sitting, with lightly clasped hands, forward in his chair regarding her—calm brow, steady searching eyes, the look of weariness vanished, the rosebud serenely saying that physicians have their lighter moments.

'Ye had a brave time, dear-girl?'

He spoke with grave warmth, inviting confidence. Watching his eyes while she banished from her mind all she had brought with her into the room, she could not find the shadow of a smile, but, even while she refused to afford him material, there he sat, entrenched, solidly representing dispersive generalizations. And to-day he was not waiting for her to withhold or give him his chance to pounce. Turning away his eyes he went on: 'I saw Campbell this morning, he told me ye were back and that he'd never seen ye look so well.'

Professional interest, but she was not going to be drawn into

discussing her health that was restored for evermore since she had seen the light on the mountains

'Of course,' she said judicially, conveniently recalling an overheard phrase 'the Swiss winter is marvellous You go out unable to grasp the meaning of a newspaper column'—she felt her stored wealth shift away, as if assailed, as if threatening to depart—'and after twenty-four hours you can read a stiff treatise and remember each point'

'Did ye read stiff treatises?'

'No, but I could remember anything I wanted to, and see *into* things' She threw her raised voice after him as he got up and moved away—feeling herself forgiven, having testified, attempted to testify an incommunicable experience—to the blinded window through whose open upper half now came the sound of a car drawing up at the door interruption punctually at hand, just as she was back again in that moment on the promontory that had filled everything with light, just as she could, she felt, have answered, even though irrelevantly, all the questions on earth

With a click the blind had shot up, letting in the yellow London sunlight, and in its dense blaze she stood up to depart, for now the thudding of the engine filled the room, voices shouting it down sounded from the pavement and the steps, and the door-bell buzzed through the hall

'You are fortunate,' she sang out into the blinding light, into the indifferent ears preoccupied already with the communications of the arriving patient, 'to have a corner house!' and saw the several corridors of gold that broke across the long grey street and felt herself already escaped into its echoey stillness, going, as she had come, unspent, to meet the green mists of the park and find its new crocuses, find the close ranks of mauve and white hiding the grass of that little alley again, stand and look and again feel that cool English freshness as if touching her all over, as if she were unclothed

'Campbell was right,' he said gently into the stillness restored by the stopping of the engine, 'it's made ye like a red, red rose'

Her happy blush revealed to her the shape of her body—as

if for her own contemplation, as if her attention were being called to an unknown possession that yet was neither hers nor quite herself—glowing with a radiance that was different from the radiance of the surrounding sunlight, and turning to bend and gather up the gloves on which she had been sitting she seemed to journey far away from him and from herself into the depths of her being and mingle there with an unknown creature rising to meet and take her nature and transform it to the semblance of his ideal. And in this semblance, a stranger to herself and nameless, she came upright with the retrieved gloves in her hand and turned to face him in the room's sunlight that now seemed the light of open spaces.

'Your patient,' she had said before she was aware, towards him still standing leisurely in his window-space approaching, saying, swiftly he passed her 'He's early, he can wait. Sit down again'—and disappearing into the background whence he asked, as the everyday door of his bookcase came open with an unsouciant squeak, whether she had ever been to Italy.

'No,' she said and paused, remembering Guerini and his revelation of an Italy that was not the Italy of her dreams. And his dogmas, and his amazement in hearing them questioned, and his anger, dull brown like his clothes, and hers that had cured her, and his sorrow and belated willingness to look at alternative interpretations, and his obliteration by Eaden in whom the same dogmas, being held thoughtlessly, had seemed so much more monstrous and implacable. And seemed at this moment not to matter so very much. Neither Guerini's nor Eaden's nor Densley's nor any man's to matter perhaps at all, except to themselves. Thought of all together, reverberating over the world in all its languages, they seemed just an unpleasant noise, like the chattering of those born deaf. Yet she felt that even now, hearing them, it would be impossible to content herself, as she had observed so many women do, with a wise smile. Even now.

But this was flying off, running off with what might be an illusion. She wished the window-blind back in place that she might see more clearly, see his face when he left his books and returned, discover whether his general strangeness to-day

meant that on the strength of her absurd letter he was again minded to risk, was not expecting, a rebuff, and was yet, because he once had had one, proudly nervous and uncertain—and meanwhile she must remain here, balanced between return to her customary life and the way of being she had entered a moment ago and that could be, she now realized with sober astonishment, her chosen way till death—or whether he were simply engrossed in some sad case whose story she would presently hear told in his way of telling pausing at every turn for signs of sympathy, and yet ready to laugh over her harsh comments. And again she was reminded of Eleanor. And this time the thought of her brought within the sun's streaming light a darkness that centred in herself who a moment ago had felt transparent to endless light. A forgotten, deliberately forgotten darkness disqualifying her to be anything to anybody.

'What has become of Eleanor Dear?'

'When did ye last heere of her, lassie?' The sparing, softly treading tone of his stories of his most dreadful cases gentle judgment, without reproach.

'Oh, I don't know—ages ago'—her voice was hard, frostily selfish, something for a man to fly from—'when that heroic little Jew took her to Egypt'

'Then ye've not heard of her death?'

It was not shock or sadness that kept her silent. Immense, horrible relief in being certain that now the burden of Eleanor would never again return upon her hands. And great wonder, that Eleanor had done her dying. Somewhere, in some unknown room, she had accomplished that tremendous deed Alone.

'Rodkin took her to Egypt'—he was bringing the comfort of his voice across the room—'first consulting me'—but remained out of sight behind her chair with a book, slowly turning its leaves that went over with a crumpling sound, large, glazed clay-paper leaves, heavy—'and kept her there for something over eighteen months. She got no better. When they returned, she was beyond human aid. His resources were exhausted. We got her into St Aloysius's. The sisters were kind and grew fond of her. My mother visited her daily and

was with her when she passed away I think she was happy at the end'

Eleanor, forced to cease fighting and accept, lying there hollow-eyed and emaciated, growing weaker and weaker, but still charming, free, while she waited for those halls of Zion all jubilant with song, to charm these new friends

'The little atheist Russian Jew was a better Christian than the English curate'

'He married her, in Egypt The bairns have father and name'

'Lancelot and Lobelia *Rodkin*' Her voice trembled with laughter In which he joined, and Eleanor, driving away her fierce authoritative little frown, and with rose-blush and arch affectionate smile, seemed, from heaven, to be joining too She would She would accept anything but reproach Ease had come, though the picture of herself indignantly preaching at Eleanor for wasting Rodkin's substance remained an immovable torment and disgrace He had laughed his lightly gasping extremity of laughter and yet did not come round to face and share her mirth But she felt absolved He knew, better perhaps than any one, he had seen again and again, the worst that was in her—intolerance, hatred, malice no, not malice, something worse, uncharitableness, the things he most deplored—without condemnation He knew perfectly, from first to last, all of Eleanor's manœuvrings, without condemning them Small wonder he was the beloved physician

Her sense of her own being, with its good and bad carelessly unmasked, more at ease in this room than in any other but her own, was expanding beyond this corner she knew so well, taking possession of the unvisited parts of the room brought near by his perambulating voice, feeling its way into the wider spaces within the air that filled its visible limits But imperfectly, hindered by the direct glare of the sun and the presence of the patient waiting in the next room

'I asked ye about Italy, because I rather think of going there' This time his voice, coming from the farthest end of the room, as if he were in that deep recess and looking out of its tall, narrow window, was like the voice of someone giving a cheery

morning greeting to someone else suddenly and gladly seen from the midst of busy preoccupation confident of response, not needing to wait and take note of it. It came nearer than if he were sitting at her side.

'People were going down,' she said, and the distance they had to travel made her words songful—they were meeting across the length of the sad room, he and she, from the far distances of their separate beings, obliterating, with the sounds of their common to-day, the melancholy echoes left within it—from Oberland. They go, in one day, from the Swiss winter into the Italian spring.'

'I'll go,' he chanted back through the clatter of a dray turning into a neighbouring mews, 'if I go, from Paris, where I'll be attending the Medical Congress the first week in May.'

The dray thundered swiftly over the cobble-stones, spreading a clamour that consumed every other sound.

'Don't ye think,' said his gentlest voice just above her head, 'I'll have earned a holiday?' His arms, linked by the large book, came over and round her, and the book came down opened upon her knees—a double-page picture of Venice, Grand Canal edged by stately buildings, gondolieri gracefully driving swift gondolas along the flat water, moonlight and song. He was crouching at her side, his face out of sight, just level with her own, one arm along the back of the low chair, the other tilting the book inwards from the blinding light.

'Isn't that where people go for their honeymoon?' he murmured thoughtfully, as if considering the picture.

She felt him watching while she waited, gazing through the outspread scene, for words more in harmony than was this arch jocularly with the steady return of the strange new light within her that now streamed forth to join the blinding sunlight, so that she was isolated in a mist of light, far away from him and waiting for the sound of her name.

'Ye still scorn honeymoons.'

He was gone. The light flowed back into herself as she turned and saw him standing tall and upright, elbow on mantelpiece, several feet away, saw his face, sad above the pink rosebud and as nearly stern as in its changeless kindness it could ever be.

What had he seen while he watched? Her perfect stillness while she contemplated a proposition? And perhaps he was right. The strange vision of the future expanding endlessly in light had held as she gazed into it no personal thought of him and prompted no response.

Gently she approached him, trying in the way she again pleaded for his wretched patient to convey the change produced in her regard by this discovery of him as a source of marvels. But he held her off with casual talk. He now believed, and she grew scarlet and took hasty leave as the thought came, that he had completely surprised her, and that this belated response was a clutching at an opportunity whose quality had been realized while she sat silent. And perhaps he was right in that too. Perhaps the strange glory to which she had responded was born of a selfish rejoicing. Perhaps, watching her, he had read only the signs of a secret, selfish triumph. Missed some essential, unmistakable sign.

Yet gravely and with a meditative enviousness he had said more than once that a husband opens for his wife the gate of a temple into which he may not follow her. And still in that moment of being wrapped in light that could have come only through the opened gate, he had expected her to respond in kind to his sly jocularities? Had closed the gate and left her outcast because she was kept silent and entranced, forgetting his personal presence, seeing only the newness of life into which she was about to step.

Walking on down the street, she turned again towards that strange moment, trying to recall the experience. But it was the visible pageant of marriage that rose before her eyes, so suitably, she felt now, a floral pageant. Wistfully, with new knowledge and interest, she watched the form of the satin-clad bride adream in a vast loneliness of time that was moving with the swiftness of the retreating movement of the years that were leaving her for ever, amidst a bevy of wide-awake, hopeful bridesmaids, vanish into the dark porch of the church whose clamour of bell-notes, falling in cascades into the sunlit air, brightened the light upon the grey buildings, saw the led bride, a lonely representative of humanity, measuring off the last

moments of her singleness, reluctantly until the other equally lonely representative came in sight, waiting for her at the altar, and the footsteps of her spirit hurried to be with him

She heard the two voices sound out from time into eternity, amidst a stillness of flowers, and the triumphant crashing of the Mendelssohn March as the two figures came forth from the vestry door and came down the aisle towards the light falling upon them from the high west window

It was because life with Densley would hold the light of an in-pouring eternity that she had found herself willing to throw in her lot with his In Hypo there was no sense of eternity, nor in Michael, except for the race, an endless succession of people made in God's image, all dead or dying

Yet she was approving the rescue of Densley Vibrating within her, side by side with resentment, was relief And as she surveyed the little back street, where now she found herself, in search of food to be consumed in the ten minutes left of her lunch-hour, she felt, with a comfortingly small pang of wistfulness, the decisive hour that had just gone by slide into its place in the past and leave her happily glancing along the shop-fronts of this mean little back street

Teetgen's Teas, she noted, in grimed, gilt lettering above a dark and dingy little shop

Teetgen's Teas And behind, two turnings back, was a main thoroughfare And just ahead was another And the streets of this particular district arranged themselves in her mind, each stating its name, making a neat map

And *this* street, still foul and dust-filled, but full now also of the light flooding down upon and the air flowing through the larger streets with which in her mind it was clearly linked, was the place where in the early years she would suddenly find herself lost and helplessly aware of what was waiting for her eyes the moment before it appeared the grimed gilt lettering that *forced me to gaze into the darkest moment of my life and to remember that I had forfeited my share in humanity for ever and must go quietly and alone until the end*

And now their power has gone They can bring back only the

memory of a darkness and horror, to which, then, something has happened, begun to happen?

She glanced back over her shoulder at the letters now away behind her and rejoiced in freedom that allowed her to note their peculiarities of size and shape

From round the next corner came a distant, high, protesting, nasal yell dropping into a long shuddering gurgle *Punch* She turned the corner There they were at the end of the street

In front of a greengrocer's a few slum children standing in the muddy street, more numerous elders, amongst them a busy doctor, paused for a moment, a teacher, excusing her delight with a sceptical smile, two rapt hospital nurses

Munching one of the greengrocer's foreign apples, tasting like pineapple, she held up her face towards the mimic theatre high in air, from which joy flowed down upon this little crowd eagerly and voluntarily gathered together

CHAPTER IV

OBERLAND again, its golden light, and its way of making its outer world conform to its inner. Something of heaven, precarious, but temporarily closing the doors of hell. Shedding its light upon the young man swiftly crossing the lounge alone, a little shifty, burdened with some threat, uneasy in hurrying alone from point to point in the world-wide enclosure.

'Here she is!' Alma's voice, and Alma appearing from along a corridor of greenery, in a filmy West End gown. Arrived, with power and freedom to move and choose and be at ease in the manner of a native, in the world whose outermost fringes she had touched in girlhood. (Coming up, on great occasions, in a hired omnibus, with a party of excited people, all being excessively sociable and slaying, without knowing it, the very occasion as it passed—to the Gaiety.)

And now both of them, two little figures side by side, two little Oberlanders, conforming, dressed in defiance of Lycurgan tweeds and *djibbés*.

Their voices, amongst those of the birthright members of the world-wide Oberland sounding from all over the quietly-lit restaurant, were alien. In pitch and intonation. But their minds gave to the corner where they sat the character of a small preserve of originality within the wide spread of innocent conventionality. Yet they were both under the spell of the innocent conventionality, a little eager in their conformity, rather too consciously at home and at ease.

Giving her time, being so far too busy with correct by-play to notice her silence, to delight in their surprising tribute to Oberland. She had expected them to stand out from this world, unmoved by it and revealing their differently directed vitality. They were quenched. By their own correct clothes and the further garment of their surroundings.

Toned up, in the midst of the fatigue left by the day, by the interest of meeting them for the first time in the open, she glanced at Hypo sitting at her side in uniform, cut off from his moorings and launched in the sea of London life, and observed how his dress clothes, while accentuating his commonplace type, deepened the quality of the blue-grey eyes that was himself visible. Grey of high-power intelligence turned outwards, twinkling blue of sanguine nature at home in delights, hampering the austere grey.

There was no seaward window through which his gaze could escape across the world, and the clear light, replacing the upper twilight created by the Bonnycliff lamp-shades, showed the blue and the grey beams together in full power, dammed up and, so carefully was he not looking about, short-circuiting, embarrassing his mind as the rather small sofa upon which the three of them sat side by side was embarrassing his movements. Embarrassment from which, in Oberland, she, as his feminine guest, should be helping him to escape.

And again, as in early days at the Alpenstock, while bathing in the light created by the men and women about her, she was in conflict with the convention that kept urbane women alert at the front gates of consciousness to guard the ease of men waiting to be set going on their topics.

Reminded by the suave voices sounding from the level near at hand and, in distant parts of the room, from the upper air into which they rose—assailing her with memories of their rivals, the sounds echoing in the open amongst the Oberland mountains—of the instantaneous flow of words in just this pitch of voice and shape of tone the moment two or more Alpenstockers were gathered together, she cried within herself that it was indecent, and could have sat back and laughed aloud over the tide of masquerading sound, only that the ugly poor word worried her with its negative, insufficient expression of the destructive power of incessant speech.

‘Outrageous,’ she murmured.

‘Right.’ Hypo’s voice at her side, clear and mirthful within its huskiness like the blue within the misty grey. ‘Caviare’s outrageous. No caviare.’

The waiter was there, the evening begun, its events counting themselves off, only this small half-hour available for being together, with the tension of expectation making its moments shallow

As if he feared the man might run away, as if to register his awareness, and disapproval, of the way waiters are apt to make off before their '*beneficent* and *necessary*,' but '*tiresome*,' business is properly concluded, and to give warning that on this occasion patience was needed but would be rewarded by entertainment, Hypo kept a hand upheld in the direction of the waiter and crooked towards him a detaining, instructive finger while slowly he deciphered, French syllable by syllable, in the manner of a child learning to read—each syllable equally accented, but offered as if in itself it were someone's most priceless unconscious jest—the items of their feast, half raising his head, after each quotation, in the direction of the waiter for confirmation and permission to bend once more, first drawing breath for the renewed effort, over his '*arduous*,' but '*diverting*,' task. When this small exhibition was over he would drop into talk, but only after a swift collecting glance, achieved in the course of turning in speech towards Alma or herself, at the immediately surrounding and possibly appreciatively witnessing neighbours

Outrageous, she resumed within, while there was yet time, but found in her mind only a vision of Alma gracefully set towards the little drama, the smile produced for it left forgotten on her face while away within her hidden world she mused alone

The dismissed waiter passed by, gliding headlong, pushed open a near door that let in a wave of heat, the glare of un-screened light, the sounds of foreign voices shouting orders against the kitchen-clatter, in high-pitched nasal monotone the world beneath this festive scene, supporting it

Unconscious Oberlanders, complacently accepting. And all over the world a growing strength, with revengeful eyes set only upon the defects of the qualities that had built the high-walled Lhasa now preserving a perilous mental oblivion

She listened to their sounds. Subdued buzzing, barking and fluting of English voices, laughter women's laughter

springing delicately, consciously beautiful, from note to note upwards or downwards in the scale, spontaneous croakings of elderly women, graduates in life, men's laughter whuffing out on single notes that seemed to resound from distant places where life is risked and won

'All these manicured voices,' she said quietly, leaning outwards to catch also Alma's ear, and collided with Hypo's voice and saw him drop his remark half-finished and swiftly turn a hopeful, investigating eye Alma's laugh tinkled, abruptly accentuated, mirthless An extinguisher And whilst Hypo, accepting it, passed it on warmed and disarmed by a flattering, appreciative grin, Miriam saw, deep-drawn for her benefit on Alma's brow—as she turned to select her hors d'œuvre, repeating her sound in order to assert her stewardship of the conversation and keep silent during the instant required for improvising a fresh departure, the initiator of so unsuitable a topic—a pucker of disgust

'Ears,' said Hypo in his low-comedian manner, eyebrows up in hopeless reflectiveness, hands thrown out in a small gesture of mock despair, 'voices and ears'

'I know Don't be afraid'

Sitting back to talk for him alone, she said, as the little dishes came her way and she was obliged to come again into the open, in tones modulated to exclude Alma from all but the sound of their cool engrossment 'There's something a fortnight old you must hear at once, before it loses its first charm,' and helped herself at random and sat back, unwilling to feast and forget or endanger the bright landscape of thought that here, on neutral territory, she could so much more easily induce him to contemplate than if she were facing him, entrenched and defensive, upon his accustomed background

'You shall tell me,' he said in the restrained, self-amused manner that would show, at short range, as the prelude to a witticism, 'anything you like,' glowing voice for herself, glance at the waiter to share and steer his awareness in the way it should go nice gentleman humouring wilful young lady, 'if,' finger up to announce arrival of epigram, 'you'll take an anchovy and an olive' He was unattained, perhaps unattain-

able, intent only on keeping the balance between his sense of the occasion as public and at the same time a meeting of lovers

'You'll have to *listen*' Alma's lovely eye, as gracefully she bent to the morsel on her fork, came round surveying 'Anchovy,' said Hypo firmly, 'we're here to consume, each other's minds if we've time before they're dissolved in Wagner, but also olives and things'

'I want you to repeat something for me' She turned to her food as the patient waiter passed on and Alma's eye, coming round once more, reassured, took another direction, a happy sense of security closed about her, the certainty that neither his adroitness nor Alma's permanent readiness to create diversions would prevent the launching of her discovery upon its beneficent career

'Say, being careful to speak slowly, "Too many irons in the fire"'

'Is this a parlour game? You *are* a dear, Miriam'

'It's the time and the place and the topic, all together Speak'

'There's nothing in reason I wouldn't do for you, Miretta, even to saying too many irons in the fire'

'Too fast I wanted to beat time to the convulsions'

'As a prelude to *Wagner*' he began, speaking slowly while he felt for a witticism she intended not to hear

The people at the near table, centring on the man with pebble-eyes, grey-agate, full of unconscious spiritual awareness, and an innocent wide brow—just left off telling a tale in his cheerful-apologetic voice that could press on through anything and leave no one hurt, though some self-judged and perhaps to see him again in memory as he was at this moment, at future moments of being brought face to face with themselves—were now all babbling at once, like those who having heard music must shield themselves from its influence or hide their inability to enter it, by discussion

'Every one,' she said, free to speak at ease, 'excepting most of the people here and their like, suffer, when they say those words, seven separate, face-distorting convulsions'

He was attending Alma, deafened by the clamour to the

right and aware only of her quietly conversational bearing and, glancing at Hypo, of his attention absented inwards in contemplation of something just offered to his thought, let her eyes rest on Miriam's and sent forth, through the dreamy mildness shining from them because her lips were curved in a smile, the deep magnetic radiance Miriam had found in one of her photographs, a radiation of her inner being he must have known while still they were lovers and it was turned only upon himself who had called it forth, and now saw only when by chance he witnessed the turning of it upon others, in payment for help given in the labours exacted by her perpetual stewardship of his well-being

Receiving this radiance fully for the first time, Miriam felt she could kneel, with the world's manhood, in homage to the spirit of the womanly woman, yet shared, as the radiance passed, their cramped uneasiness, the fear that makes them flee, once they are committed to the companionship of these women, from the threat of being surrounded and engulfed in insufficiency

She leaned forward seeking for something to sing out by way of greeting, but Alma met and held her up and sent her back with the intense, crinkled, quizzical little smile that was her rallying-call for attention to immediate things. Her sudden immortal beauty had vanished and in its place was one of the many facets of that part of her being that was turned towards outside things the bright brisk active little person, selfless and strong in endurance behind her fragile austere daintiness, willing to help every one on his way. Approved by both, Miriam sat back, licensed to be happy, and within the enclosed air there came a freshness from the wide spaces through which together they were travelling as they sat

'Tooo, *men-ny, eye-erns, in, the fy-er* Incessant chin-wagging Jaws moving round like grindstones Toom-ny ahns in'th'fah Just two small snaps'

'Labour-saving I see your point But it costs beauty'

'English vowels are ugly to begin with "I" deserves all its sufferings The people I am talking about, whose speech

—at least the men's speech—has been shaped at public school and college, turn it into a German "o" modified. And they do the same with the equally ugly English "a." "All that has made England great" becomes with them "ol thot hos mod England groht." And they do so not because they recognize that the sound of the vowels is ugly, but for a *much* more fascinating reason. And the genteel *middle* classes turn the ugly "i" into "e" or "a." "refined" becomes "refaned" or "re-feened." Also for a fascinating reason which is not the same as the reason of those socially above them. And they, too, jib at "a." "Diana, where is your black hat?" becomes "D1-enna, where is your bleck het?"

'Below these, and for still another fascinating reason, you get "a" turned into "oy" or "ah," "refoined" or "refahnd." The only people who preserve the native hideousness of the English "i" and "a" are the cultured middle classes, academics, and all those who don't care what happens to their faces while they speak so long as their speech is what they imagine to be correct. Respect for beauty is not the cause either of correct English speech or its various manglings, nor of the way English words are accented, nor of the way the English *walk*. Look at the swing of a Highland regiment. Swirling pipes and swaying kilts, and swinging tread that keeps the body always balanced in movement and never with dead flat foot upon the ground. English march music *pounds* its beats like someone hitting out, and if you put Englishmen into kilts the kilts would not swing to the march.'

'Get back to your theme, Miriam. If labour-saving isn't the point, what is?'

'There are, of course, people with no ear, or with badly developed speech-organs, speaking horribly, in all classes, but they are not the originators of any of the jargons. And the jargon we are specially considering, the one that is most hated, by those not born to it, because it is upper class and seems supercilious as well as affected, is honest and innocent.'

'Origin, origin.'

'Innocent and most desperately interesting. The other jargons, the middle- and lower-class, are innocent too, but less

interesting The middle-class jargon is *muncing* originates in a genteel aspiration, a desire to keep the mouth closed Hence *refaned*, and *nace*, and *nane* Or, in people with very long noses, *refeened*, and *neece*, and *neene* The lower-class variations, like the provincial, originate in a hearty revelling in sound, especially in open-mouthed vowels And when people discuss the possibility of English becoming a world speech, I always wonder which English they have in mind Speech is the Englishman's only gesture Hence its heavy accentuation All the jargons have that An undergraduate accents his speech exactly as he accents his walk, in jerks'

'Point, Miriam What is the origin of the speech you, a professed Socialist, are now found treacherously adoring?'

'I'm not taking *sides* any more You can't have a middle without edges, right and left Or edges without a middle'

'Nonsense I'm interested in your thread, and have a sneaking sympathy with the way you festoon and tie it in knots But if you have a point to make, make it In the straight and narrow way'

'Narrow, exactly That's for action In speech the straight and narrow way is always either a *lie* or an *exhibition* That is the curse of speech its inability to express several things simultaneously All the unexpressed things come round and grin at everything that is said One day I shall become a Trappist'

'Wait, a few years Meanwhile make your point'

'The point is a technique, born of a spiritual condition A state of mind, if you prefer But the condition and the technique are so closely akin that you can actually make discoveries about the state of mind by experimentally adopting the technique It is, up to a point, of course only up to a point, true, that if you speak in a certain way you will feel correspondingly Anyhow you can know that the technique was honestly born And is so born again and again, although it now appears to go ahead in its own right as the manner of a single class, and those who grow up in it, or acquire it at school or college, use it quite naturally'

'Spiritual condition, state of mind *Point*, Miriam'

'Concentration Imagine yourself in a position of responsibility, a prefect in a public school'

'Heaven forbid'

'A prefect, obliged to canalize all your forces and have all your wits about you, in order to remain the composed and authoritative representative of a code You won't spend your strength on elocution, unless you are an aesthete, which is unlikely, since, if you were, you would not also be a prefect Being a prefect, you will instinctively avoid all sounds that tend to discompose your authoritative and dignified mug Hence *Ieee left myeee bag at the staytion* becomes *oh loft m'bog at th'stoshn*, and all the rest of it Ineffable, of course, in a sixth-form boy But it begins there, and then goes through the services, all over the dominions and colonies, and for a reason probably quite easy to find, is rampant in the Indian Civil Surroundings perhaps And in the diplomatic, where graciousness and bonhomie are as important as dignified composure, and authority is not specially called for, I will wager that there is less jargon and more face-convulsion Humbug, in fact facial animation, to disarm People who speak *beautifully*, like those who have beautiful handwriting, are *usually* either humbugs or charlatans Not that a touch of these is necessarily bad Or they are Scotch or Irish Shaw speaks beautifully But he's never been an English prefect or commanded a battleship, or stood on the terrace of an ancestral home gazing out across an empire So he can afford to let himself go on musical sounds And be witty in and out of season That's all, I think Just that the apparently deliberate *jargon* of these Romans is, in its origin, both innocent and inevitable But there is one frightful exception the way some, only some, of them elaborate one of the a's When they say, for example, "South Ayahfrica," and call a man a "mayan," they are quite deliberately *drawling* But perhaps, all things considered, it is pardonable, only, being so noticeable, it is the one fragment of their technique that is usually imitated by outsiders and, in them, can be simply intolerable For all the rest it is surely better to force speech to pass through your composure and take its chance of damage, rather than to be

obediently correct and let it throw you into convulsions At any rate for men, who can so rarely speak quite spontaneously and beautifully Flowingly, un-selfconsciously, without any definite tone-shape or technique, ugly and beautiful, of accentuation That seems to be for women But that is another whole big question I only wish to show how unjustly the convention of these Romans is condemned'

'You've done it, I think, Miretta, quite triumphantly But don't waste yourself, your curious perceptiveness and your sensitively discriminating ear, on these clan dialects Learn languages'

'But isn't it worth while to realize that these people are darlings and not *poseurs*? *What's this?*' The savoury-smelling dish had appeared at her elbow slyly, as if it were a trap prepared to take her by surprise while her attention was far away She stared at the raised roof of sheeny golden-brown crust, fascinated, wondering at her strange sudden apprehensiveness

'Lark pie, madame'

Brought back by the sound of her soft, sharp cry from the instant's loss of herself in horrified vision, she found the party broken up, herself set apart struggling with the remains of the emotion that had innocently rebuked their insensibility Sideways, while she sat controlling her risen tears, she saw Hypo motion the waiter away with what was perhaps the main item of his ordering—she tried in vain to recall what had been served—and keep going, with the manner and gestures of conversational engrossment, the appearance of unbroken continuity, ready to include her as soon as she should have recovered But for her there was no rescue She was alone, with them and her Romans to whom they conformed without approval, and the innocent pie that had so horribly reminded her she was off the line of her march

The *What am I doing here?* that had sounded from time to time during their past association came back on this evening created by that past and yet fitting so perfectly into the present that had seemed to exclude them, and indeed was admitting them only as participators, more favourably circumstanced than herself, in the Oberland life

But though it sounded insistently, it held now a promise, as if of an appointment made towards which, though all her ways seemed blocked, she was invisibly moving. Always had been moving, driven on in the end, whenever she had for a moment thought herself arrived at her destination, by its warning cry. It had sounded everywhere, almost daily, at Banbury Park at Wimpole Street, at Flaxman's, in the houses of all her friends, everywhere. Except for a while amidst the loveliness of Newlands and, earlier, of Germany, where in the midst of suffering there had been that deep depth of happiness for whose sake she would have gone on enduring for ever.

'Foreign countries,' she said, and felt them both turn a little eagerly, and felt this moment in the restaurant become one with their past together. They were held waiting, attentive to her engrossment in the reality she wanted them to share the way one's own deep sense of being, so vibrant and so still, is never stronger or more curiously alarming than when it is confirmed by being found existing in foreign, unknown ways of being. The same way set in a different form. A form that in Germany had its voice in music that drew even Fraulein into the magic circle and disarmed her. But they would not share it. There was no way of proving the importance of the individual deep sense of being that for them meant little or nothing. And no means of making them stop their keyed-up mental processes. Shaped by *fashion* well, by *making*, by *men*.

'Of course,' she said, breaking her train of thought and coming into the surface moment, but still so full of widely dispersed feeling that she had no idea what she might be going to say. 'Of course there is actually no such thing as travel. So they say. There is nothing but a *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, meaning *de tout ce que je suis*, even in a *tour du monde*'.

'We are going to travel, Miriam, *everywhere*. This small planet is a misfit.'

He glanced at her and checked himself, ironically, smiling round over the table where now sweets and coffee and dessert, assembled together, announced the hurried end. He was reminding himself that didactic speculations were the wrong note

'There 's more space within than without,' she said And he had heard, the first clear statement she had found to assert her world against his own, and refrained and winked at her affectionately from the midst of beginning to be amusing over the hasty winding up of their feast, and presently glanced swiftly again, for his own purpose, genuinely incredulous over her persistent earnestness

In the dark interior of the cab, part of London's Oberland, linking its sacred spaces, Hypo and Alma became once more fellow-adventurers, reduced to simplicity by the prospect of being submissive items in the community of a London audience She warmed towards them both, glad of their ignorance of the great moment last week when she had included them in a past that was finished, glad of that common past from which they had reappeared in the guise of fellow-members, more practised than herself but still aspirant, of the world-wide house-party

Embodying the whole history of her London life, they gave a measure to the occasion that was now falling happily into its place as the first event of the new life begun amongst the sunlit mountains

For though the being with them emphasized her imprisoning circumstances, it was also strengthening her inward certainty by revealing that the fact-facing and circumstance-facing mood they induced had no longer any power at all over the light shining from the future over her earliest memories revived in Oberland and now leaping forward regardless of the intervening years

In the midst of Hypo's talk, she smiled towards the visible radiance that was drawing her forward and felt that within some as yet unknown life her being had set in that moment a small deep root

A passing light flashed on her face and then on his, opposite far away, the face of a stranger caught approvingly regarding her through the eyes of an old friend Audibly, through her smile, she sighed her joy in the compact just made with the in-flowing future that already was driving this short evening into the past

'Miriam in her London is somehow different,' he said,

feeling for a compliment 'She's pervasively at home
You are a Londoner, you know, Miriam, in your bones'

'Neapolitan ices,' she said hurriedly, to shake off the discomfort of contemplating his preoccupation with surface environment, 'but it's Covent Garden we're going to How can I get to Covent Garden when I'm sitting, *avec mes parents*, aged eight, in the front row of the Lyceum dress-circle waiting for the statue of Hermione to come to life, and about to be moved, very deeply, by the sight of a striped Neapolitan ice?'

'Bless'er,' said Alma, converting the dismal interior of the growler into another of the many rooms in which together they had sat and talked

They were being taken an immense distance along the main gallery, a hopeless distance, nearer and nearer to stage and music A box Of course

Who first took the very worst part of the house for seeing and hearing and, by making it the costliest, made it also the most exclusive? The convention arose when theatres were ill-lit and only those near the stage could see the spectacle? And continued now that it was worse than useless? And he was docile to it 'A box at the opera,' suitable only for those who regarded opera as a social occasion, an after-dinner entertainment of which they were a prominent part, splendid, correct, bored, within the sanctuaries they had hired for the season because it was part of the season's routine

The first glimpse of the house and curtained stage seemed to prove to her that boxes are not in the theatre at all, but 'in Society'

And when Alma had been persuaded into the corner commanding the least unfavourable view and she was ensconced in the relative darkness of the opposite corner, her spirit sought in vain for the familiar full power of the play-house, the power that exerted itself independently of what might be presented on the stage It could be felt in perfection only by those seated centrally, in stalls, not too near, in dress-circle, not too far back, in pit, almost anywhere in the pit, and in gallery so long as the stage was just visible

Hypo came forward from hanging up his coat in the hinder

darkness, and took his seat between them and the light fell upon the three of them perched side by side upon the face of a cliff, facing the world, facing other cliff-dwellers whose world they had reached. She felt excitedly composed, ensconced and supported, journeying along a wide, easy pathway of life from which there need be no return. This going with them from point to point of a London evening was a sharing of life in a way not possible in their own house, a sharing of experience that committed them to each other for good.

'A box, of course, is marvellous. A lodge in the wilderness. Which is why the French call them *loges*. In their *domestic* way. A temporary *chez-soi*. The English, delighting in separation, call them *boxes*, things shut-in.'

'Privacy, and freedom to come and go without assault and battery.'

'True. But when you visit a picture gallery do you prefer to look at the pictures from one side? Not that one wants to *see* opera. I shall imagine the stage. Sit with my back to it.'

'Don't. The point about this chap's music dramas is that they are music dramas. That is why they are such an admirable solvent. Be advised.'

'There is no possible representation that can compete with the vast scenes his music brings to your mind. I shall see, with the lit stage behind me instead of the Queen's Hall orchestra in front, much bigger scenes than the stage could hold. No one can see and hear to perfection at the same moment. And the wonder of Wagner is that through your ears he makes you see so hugely. All humanity pouring itself into space. A huge, exciting world-party. *Your* musician, by the way. Beethoven and Bach are experiences and adventures of the solitary human soul. In all its moods. Wagner is everybody speaking at once.'

'He's a great chap. He's devised unprecedentedly splendid noises. His fault is a Germanic fault, a weakness for the redemption idea.'

The lights went down as if shocked, blotting out the crowded stalls with a uniform covering of luminous, bluish patches.

'They look like snow under moon-shadows.'

'I *won't* have you away in Switzerland, Miriam,' he murmured while she listened to the magic tinkling of rings and swishing of draperies as the curtains drew apart, and saw the light, from the stage she did not mean to face, fall upon the audience massed below

But immediately she was aware that she would hamper him by having his face in sight as he leaned forward to look. Having had the last word, without which he could not rest, having fed his indispensable certainty of steering the situation, and having reached both ends by means of an adroit flattery, he was now free to descend into simplicity, impossible, for him, in presence of a witness

He sat there with his mind on holiday. He had wanted an evening in town, a break with his long, enforced seclusion. Also to catch her in the full after-glow of her successful holiday, and submit her, in the best possible circumstances, to the emotional solvent of music. It had all fitted most admirably and here he was, gladly back in London after his years of seclusion, in correct London clothes, complete with gibus, seated in a box at the opera, between wife and lover elect, with Wagner expressing the world in sound, restoring his confidence in the proportions of the human spirit, rousing and blessing his emotions and the emotions of the young lady at his side. It was all very good, and all well in hand. But he must not be watched, obstructively

So she turned a little sideways and saw, over her right shoulder, the glow of the stage

The music swept by on its way to those who were in the direct line of its attack, and left her incompletely attained. Free to think and to be consciously aware of the emotional tinge given to her thoughts by the mere presence of the tide of sound. A solvent, as he had said. But though now she knew why after standing, weary to begin with, for a whole evening listening to orchestral music, she could walk home singing and full of happiness and strength, she could feel no sympathy with the planful tinkering with the hidden shape of things implied in his conscious, deliberate submitting of himself and her to a bath of music. A man's job perhaps. Yet

to have a distinct end in view endangers both end and means
 To know beforehand where you are going is to be going
 nowhere Because it means you are nowhere to begin with
 If you know where you are you can go anywhere, and it will
 be the same place, and good

Still, his plan was working But the emotions rising in her
 as she heard the massed music roll by and saw in her mind's
 eye the little figures on the stage whose voices boomed or
 yelled against the orchestral din, now reaching through, now
 lost in it altogether, were not those he intended The tre-
 mendous ado, by its sheer size and strength, and because
 through his mistaken technique of sitting in a box it was not
 having its full chance, was emphasizing for her, in her de-
 tached coolness, all that it left unsaid, all that is said by the
 music of Bach—which would have been quite unsuited to his
 purpose stillness, dailiness, the quiet, blissful insight whose
 price is composure The deep, quiet sense of *being*—what he
 called 'turnip-emotion'—was more, even to these protesting
 people, than all of which they were raving and shrieking
 Perfect in itself Every sound in the world, every protest and
 cry of agony, every relieving shriek of hysteria, is tribute to
 the sure knowledge of life's perfection Otherwise, why
anything?

Senta's little spinning-song, heard in its setting, flowed
 forth from this knowledge It prevailed against the earlier
 roaring of sea-music and would prevail against the din and fury
 of life in which she was to be caught Singing to herself over
 her wheel, she was truth

'Is there a good *German* effect?' she asked in his ear

'Lots of little Miriams in pigtails, *look*,' he answered, and
 she saw him off guard, simplified, too long ensconced in re-
 actions to capture his usual form at a moment's notice

Turning to the stage, she saw golden light, the warm gold
 of stage sunlight, long-haired maidens in full, bright skirts
 and dark velvet bodices laced across brief triangles of white
 muslin, Senta at her wheel in the midst long-haired, a thicker
 rope of platted golden hair distinguishing her as the chosen
 representative of girlish felicity Singing to herself over her

wheel Singing her sunlight and her being and her happiness
'Tragically brief' Indestructible

Back again with Hypo and Alma in their hotel lounge, she found that the music heard and the few scenes, seen so unsatisfactorily sideways, had yet reached to the depths of her being and seemed now to assail her, as she sat relaxed and strong, from the whole of surrounding space

The cool lager poured down her throat in a single living stream

'Bravo, Miriam! Ain't she splendid, Alma?' Tossing off her beer like a man and smoking *con amore*

Alma raised a hand to smooth her hair, and dropped the pearls she had been fingering with the other, to stifle a yawn

Here, with the many palms giving green light and life to the little lounge, the evening seemed to begin. It was time to go, to drop away and face the walk home, alone, through the chilly midnight streets that began to cast, as soon as a space of lamplit stillness lay between her and the scene she had left, their old, unfailing spell. Unsharable. Although, to-night, the mellow, golden light, falling upon deserted roadway and silent grey stone building, was deepened by the glow of the hours from which she had come forth

CHAPTER V

THE sudden lull seemed to call the attention of these separated groups to something they were missing. Two voices, one at either end of the long room, caught in mid-sentence, combined for a moment their conspicuous sounds, and then fell into silence.

Talkers, frozen in the attitude of conversation, listeners surprised at their task of keeping talkers going, relaxed in relief at the cessation, or, remaining tense, unconsciously revealing their various motives, glanced about the room as if looking for the cause of the interruption.

The gap was filled by the sound of the traffic pouring along the side of the square that was open to the main road. And now into the silence came the deep boom of a distant church clock, expending its warmth through the chilly outer twilight and pervading the room as though the silence were a space prepared for it. As the sixth stroke faded, the sound of the traffic emerged gay and headlong. Evening traffic, heralding the coming of darkness and the bright lights of the London streets.

A few voices had resumed, trying to prolong. But the quality of time had changed. It was no longer afternoon. The evenings of all the people in the room were flowing into their minds. Groups broke up and mingled in the to and fro of departure.

On her way to the door, Miriam was pulled up by the voice of a woman who had turned from a small group standing close at hand, hatless residents. The voice had an eager, anxious, apologetic sound and gave her exit the air of royalty in procession, graciously halted to accept a petition.

Turning, in the gloom hardly lessened at this end of the long room by the switching on of a distant, shaded light, she saw only a dim outline, a pale oval of face saluting her, obliquely

down-tilted above a gown glowing silky rose-red through the dusk in which the forms of the other women showed no colour. Here was 'charm,' some strange grace and charm that was defying the warning voice within. The figure, assuming as she confronted it a fresh attitude of graceful pleading, had now a level face whose eyes were smiling recognition, patiently-reproachfully, a much-tried adorer, who yet was making allowances, for too long an instant being forced to prompt and wait for an answering recognition. Inwardly protesting her extreme unrelatedness to this person moving so elegantly from pose to pose, yet attracted by the unaccountable glow, as if the rose-red gown shone for her in the gloom by its own light, and held by a curious intensity of being in the alien figure, Miriam waited unresponsive.

'You were talking of socialisme,' said the girl, motionless in a final pose which she seemed to offer as part of her plea, head sideways down-bent as if listening, arms held close to her silken form as if to subdue it to a touch of severity. 'I would like, so much, to hear more of theece.' Very young, but mannered and mature. An intelligent young French girl who would produce very 'rational' criticisms.

Intent on escape, vaguely undertaking to be at the club again quite soon, Miriam received a gracefully-sweeping movement of thanks and withdrawal during which the girl's eyes still held her own, but with the recognizing look withdrawn, as if now she were covering a secret compact with a witness-disarming formality. With the corner of her eye, as she turned away to the open door, Miriam saw her, in the full light now switched on from the hall, move back to the styleless English group from which she had emerged, arms down, white hands a little extended as if to balance the slight swaying movement propelling her, and which the invisible feet followed rather than led.

Down in the street, where immediately the long continuous distances of past and future opened within the air, the little scene slipped into line with the series of momentary encounters staged by the club. The quality of that moment's exchange was complete in itself. Followed up by a definite appointment,

it would have robbed this evening light and the evening streets of their power to evoke the continuous moment that was always and everywhere the same. Moving away from it unhampered, she was already losing its features, seeing it as a confirmation of the quality of the long afternoon: the talk with those three implacable women who had responded with such blessed restorative flexible-mindedness while she talked, with the eloquence of the despair that began now to fill her whenever she thought of people in large masses, against the theory of the permanent necessity for a more or less enslaved majority, to which their overheard conversation had made them seem so thoughtlessly docile, the common adventure of the deepening twilight, the sudden silence, the deep-toned bell, the instant of seeing, from within its far sound, the strangeness of human life and its incompleteness.

As she broke in at Flaxman's to dress for Mrs Redfern's evening, the memory of the girl returned as a teasing reminder, in a foreign voice, of a set of ideas that had ceased to move her unless they were attacked by someone holding another set. Waking next morning she found within the air the new spring, the inmost breath of the country springtime of which in her memory there was no trace. It was strange to have no childhood memory of spring: nothing in memory but summer in full blaze, so that even the remembered sight of anemones in woods and of cowslip balls tossed from sister to sister, crushed, giving out their small warm scent, were surrounded not by a spring scent but by summer in full bloom.

Soft deep freshness of spring stirring within the dry, inorganic, beloved London air. This moment will be the best of this year's London spring, unless I manage at last to keep my appointment with primroses. Each spring passes without sight of them, except for that one glimpse which was nothing but a reminder and a promise. All of us going along at sixes and sevens in the east wind. A skimpy cluster of trees at the wayside in the distance. Offering some kind of rescue when it should come near. Coming near enough to be one of the party and to bring a slight change in every one's feelings. Coming alongside. Three women adoring the small clumps pressed

flatly against the earth amongst the short grass, sunlit primroses And those few in the midst, deeper and brighter for being in shadow While we stood near the trees, the sky was radiant and the cruel wind doomed by the promise of summer Even the men, who only stood by, were caught and changed, lost for the instant during which they were as nothing to the three women, their hold on their great selves Afterwards, going on, there were genial voices, relieved, gay voices of women prevailing, keeping warmth in the air

And here, again, was the air of spring coming in at the thrown-up window with the light But Sunday light It was Sunday Bringing a morning without pressure or hurry Quietly Setting all nature's allurements, all allurements, in a beautiful distance Sunday morning, sweet and still and windless Bringing its own quality that was independent of all others

But the scent in the air that had brought memories of flowers was turning out to be the faint scent of soap Assurance, through the distinctness with which it came from the far side of the room, of having waked from the deepest of deep sleep From such distant deeps that now, with cool heart and eyes kept closed, and mind recoiled from knowing that the air coming in through the rotten window-frame had passed over the cat-and-garbage-haunted waste between the farther slum and the warren of Flaxman's, every outer thing was distinct, in a life that from the earliest point of memory was the same

This person who had stood for the first time alone upon the sunlit garden-path between the banks of flowers and watched them, through the pattern made by the bees sailing heavily across from bank to bank at the level of her face, and wondered at them all, flowers and bees and sunlight, at their all being there when nobody was about, and had looked for so long at the bright masses, and now could re-see them with knowledge of their names and ways and of the dark earth underneath, and, still, just as they were in that moment that had neither beginning nor end, this same person was now going, deceitfully, to local, social Lycurgan meetings, frequenting them, since Oberland, only for small delights that were the prelude,

the practice-ground for more and more and more This person, who was about to take a lover, presently, in time, at the right time, was the one who had gazed for ever at the flower-banks, unchanged

Amongst the joys near at hand, merging into them, was the fun of dressing for these gatherings as for parties in the old days at home, going forth to meet not ideas, but people to see who was there To like Mrs Redfern's radiant hostess face, ruddy face, radiant last night above her evening gown, a glinting panoply about her well-built figure advancing across the room to say to a comparative stranger 'Good girl' Coming, at the moment of her firm hand-clasp, out of her preoccupations, revealing her desire for more than the distant acquaintance of secretary and group-member And then, with eyes filming over as though she were going into a trance, announcing, as consciousness forsook her, and as if by way of apology for those so far gathered at her weekly meetings, in the manner of one heralding a Messiah, 'He is *coming*,' and a sigh expressing the end for ever of effort and responsibility, eyes still closed and lips ecstatically smiling And, moving away with brightly opened eye amongst the increasing guests, her sturdy figure, animated by the twin currents of her emotions as Lycurgan and as hostess, seeming almost willowy as she glided about with her message and presently carried it through the open folding doors to where the earlier arrivals were standing with their coffee-cups, making prevail, over the confused sound of their talking, her blissful voice

Piteous, harassed hostess, mistress of revels that had seemed all too tame to her burning fancy, blinded now by relief, unaware that she was insulting her guests in making such a to-do over the interloper for whom they were to be merely an admiring congregation Or perhaps actually, as she had always seemed, delighted with each evening in turn, and now driven to an extremity of delight But in so ecstatically describing the coming splendour she wrecked it by spreading, amongst the innocent, the wrong kind of anticipation, and by putting the others on their guard

Going through the little crowd to the far end of the second

room—where the usual gossipings and controversies were in full swing, with the difference that every one was now on the alert, turned towards the coming magnificence that for some was a challenge to their own and for others something to wait for with half-concealed impatience—there came that moment, turning round from securing a coffee at the end table, of being face to face with the tall old woman, flatly serge-clad and lace-collared as she had been on the platform of the Women's Group, stately and venerable, ripe with experience and yet young, still living towards the future, the strange moment of being the short-range object of eyes that always looked at far distances, of feeling isolated with a challenge to accept or find reasons for refusing to interpret life according to whatever principles had given to her tall, upright form the bearing of a prophetess

As she said 'Who are you?' in the dry sad voice so different from the one that had rung from the platform, the look of contemplation of wide distances moved from the eyes through which for a moment peeped forth a self-conscious schoolgirl. But that was because I was caught by my awful trick of suddenly being engrossed in a small object—a chain, a belt, or the way, flat affectionate way, a collar lies upon a dress—the individual power of these things and the strange, deceptive way they have of seeming to bestow their own soundness and well-being, even upon a person sick to death. But when I looked away, feeling ashamed and that everything between us was spoiled, the sense of her distance from myself and her attention to some large selfless plan came back.

'You are of the young who call themselves Socialists. But your feet are on the path. Go steadily.'

'I'm a Tory-Anarchist.'

Her eyes looked maternally, bringing a glow of childish satisfaction, a moment's sense of being free from the burden of independence, and immediately of feeling independence robbed of its rigidity, of being an independent person loaded with the jewels of youth and health, walking in the green valley of life far away below this old woman whose tall figure had grown broad and strong in climbing the steep middle years in

midday sunlight, till now she had reached to where perhaps feeling fades into thought And then finding the charm of the party renewed by the brief absence And gratefully, with the manner of a daughter, taking leave and moving away, just as Englehart came in at the main door Flaming hair, pale eyes, glinting with resolution His whole being a torch, peevishly seeking inflammable material, and held up by Mrs Redfern in the empty middle of the room Looking down on her from his height as upon something too tiresome even to be disposed of, and she sustaining the blaze with a brave dawning of her most roguish smile, kept back from attaining its fullness by the words with which she told her great news and by her eagerness for his pleased response

'Is Goldstein here?' Nose-high air of a supercilious camel and, before she could answer, striding departure towards the densest group

Englehart and Goldstein and Maynard intensively wrangling in the midst of an audience Rachel, in deep, blended colours and low-falling, heavy beads, looking like a rich and fragile trinket, perpetually breaking in with passionately scornful exclamations

Mrs Redfern again, saying, just as I had caught Englehart's eye and said 'Tandem's worse than cart-before-horse' and seen his fury 'My cousin has fallen in love with you Quite *demented*' And off she went, without indicating the cousin, to chant the praises of the Messiah to new arrivals 'And not only *mentally* grand So *beautiful* The most *beautiful* creature in London'

Miscarried inspirations of a prospective audience too long kept waiting Rachel's group, the lively group indifferent to the Messiah, broken up and Rachel disappeared And suddenly restored, close at hand Eager to talk to one who had no single idea she could recognize as belonging to an intelligible system

'Hallo, M H! How are you? How *nice* you look! You always do But specially nice in that gown Very, *very* nice Don't you think so? Don't you like yourself in it very much? Are you alone, or with Michael? *Isn't* it a queer

gathering? What are you doing so meekly in a corner?'
Pause Glowering glance round room, and deep flush

'Really people are incredible I've just been telling that little skunk, Mason, he is a liar'

'Which is Mrs Redfern's cousin?'

'The Octopus? Don't you *know* her? Not a bit like Bertha Redfern There she is, just beyond the fascinating Lena, with St Vincent'

'St Vincent and St Vitus Why doesn't she keep still?'

'That intense creature?'

'She's in love with me'

'The Octopus? And you've never spoken to her? She's not a lady to adore in silence'

'She's an aunt Flirting with new ideas'

'An *aunt*? That violent being?'

'Short-circuiting in a frivolous world'

'Short-circuiting! *She?*'

'Who is the old woman in a lace collar and serge dress? Sitting in the human landscape like a dark rock in a green meadow Not blending'

'Mrs McCrosson *Strange* being A *much*-experienced lady'

'Not strange at all She comes up from a deep dive unruffled, and with open eyes She reminds me, perhaps because of her age and calm wisdom, of an old woman who cruises about Bloomsbury looking qualified for a vast abdominal operation But her steady, clear eyes keep it all in order I go out of my way to pass her and meet them She knows me, now, by sight The odd thing is that she invariably appears when I am too miserable to go on living She comes rolling by, and I am restored'

Rachel made her usual scientific objections But listened Eyebrows a little up, firm mouth and chin neglected by her will and slightly drooping together with her whole slender figure crouched in thought, while I tried to make her admit that *punctuality* in the coming through of the hidden shape of things is scientific evidence

Why *mystical*? Why do these scientific people suppose

that something supplying hints, when you are not looking for them, hints that overpower the voices of reason and common sense, is more strange and mysterious than anything else? And a little dangerous and apt to be pathological? One might perhaps die of wonder if one could think hard enough over the fact of there being anything anywhere. And why not? If one could hold on when there comes the feeling that in a moment one will disappear into space. But the moment of astonishment passes with the pang it gives and everything for a while is new and strange, as if one had been away on a long visit.

Presently she said that both ways of approach, the inner and the outer, should exist together in the ideal human being. She had a sort of nostalgia. Perhaps scientific people are intellectual saints and martyrs, sacrificed to usefulness.

'Who is Mrs Redfern's latest Messiah?'

'You mean Kingfisher, Arnold Kingfisher? Oh, a *most* brilliant creature and most *incredibly* beautiful.'

And I waited for his arrival, eager to know which kind of adored male he was and forgot him, sitting in that corner of Mrs Redfern's that became nowhere—except at that moment of seeing Redfern cross a clear space of the room driven by a superior force, arms bent, mind in abeyance, head sideways up like a man in a football-scrum—while Rachel, listening, gave added warmth to all I told her of my guilty life, innocently, with her way of finding all well, if life goes pleasantly.

'I knew I should get away from Flaxman's and from Selina. According to you, having decided I must go, I ought to have made a *plan*. I didn't. Feeling myself gone, I began to like the place, and to find Selina less overpowering. It was *she* who made a plan. Suddenly told me she must get nearer her work, and asked me if I'd like to move.'

'You think that was a feeler?'

'Don't know. It's easier to read Selina's thoughts than her feelings. But in the end she betrayed feeling. Suddenly appeared, in the middle of the morning, at Wimpole Street. I sailed into the waiting-room, sailed, so deep was my astonishment, through all the memories laid up for me in the house,

things I had ceased attending to and that would most strongly have aroused Selina's interest and envy'

'Beast!'

'envy if she were in the habit of encouraging envy and were not a Christian stoic—but I've seen envy touch her, just prod at her from within and be crushed back by her strong, Christian-stoical lips and turned into a momentary and perhaps fortifying sharing of a life that to her has been a gay panorama available for her contemplation for nearly eighteen months You see? Something she can't mould or change, something independent of her and secretive, of which she does not quite approve and yet, as you will see, has grown to have an acquired taste for Something authentic in a way that does not fit her scheme of authenticities and therefore attracts her Appeals to her charitable broad-mindedness She is fed and starved by turns'

'Vain creature'

'Not a bit It has nothing to do with me, and is as much of a mystery to me as to her'

'Proceed with your story'

'Well, here it grows pathetic At the end of my glorious promenade from my room to the waiting-room door, I realized that it had been so glorious because Selina had come uncalled into the midst of one of my worlds and brought it all clearly round me from its beginnings, made it magic and new in all its distances, as it had been at the first and shall be for ever amen when I get away and it seems to fold up like a scroll'

'Are you going away from that, too?'

'Of course, presently It is finished, has been finished for some time, though there's a large homesick half of me that wants it to go for ever, as, of course, everything *does*'

'Nonsense Proceed'

'Of course everything is eternal, or it is nothing'

'Suffering, for instance, oppression, cruelty, lives that are crushed, ruined, hideous'

'All that is part of something else Vicarious suffering is the only kind that instructs'

'A *most* convenient theory'

'You and I are vicarious sufferers, gutter-snipes, poor-law children, underpaid wage-slaves without security or prospects, dancing at the edge of an abyss'

'True, but you seem to enjoy it Go back to your story'

'The prices of security, especially for women, are a damned sight too tall Monstrous Unthinkable Who wouldn't sooner die than suffocate, even on an altar with incense perpetually rising?'

'Plenty of people, millions, my dear, would choose suffocation, if it is suffocation I'm not sure'

'I am All the homes I know are asphyxiating'

'Cease these wanderings Tell me of your Selina'

'Well, yes In that moment outside the door she *was* my Selina, it was as if quite suddenly a large long *life* stood accomplished behind us and there we were, meeting, each with a solid piece of eternity in hand Now isn't that sort of thing wonderful, untouchable, whatever may happen afterwards? And all the time I was wondering what could have happened in the hour or so since I left her at Flaxman's And knowing it was good All of which, stated simply, in a brief poetic lie, would run "I was pleased to see Selina" That's somehow plain and powerful A man's statement, carrying one sanguinely along the surface of life that is so plain and simple-oh "Tell me, my dear, exactly what you mean, in a few words" My God! Ain't they the ultimate limit? The mere thought of all those men torturing, with their thin logic, the inarticulate women whose deep feelings *must* throw up cascades of words or slay them Well, with great embarrassment, she told me she wished to stay at Flaxman's and keep on our life together'

'So you stay?'

'I thought so, I was *thrilled* But I heard myself saying, explaining, that I had arranged to join a friend at Tansley Street Not a word of truth in it'

'False creature'

She meant it, and yet robbed the flight from Selina of its feeling of guilt And then she must have sat silent, contemplating beyond my knowledge, according to some chosen system of psychology, for I thought, helped by her presence,

her self concentrated on me, of next week, of returning to Mrs Bailey to the old untouched freedom with clear knowledge of what to do with it Undisturbed space, high above the quiet street, and safely below the old attic with its cruel cold and its sultry stifling heat

And then Mrs Redfern's party was there again suddenly, a bright scene in a world freshly created, people moving in a room of long ago, recognized one by one, and Rachel, reduced to the scale of the evening, was saying

'This man's not coming'

Every one, during the time of waiting, had plunged more or less into far-off spaces from which they had returned refreshed, seeing anew, in the perspectives lit by the promise of the great arrival, the group and its aims Only those who must always batten externally, on what is going on around them, were weary because nothing seemed to be happening

And Kingfisher never came And there was no prize-fight between the purveyors of wit and wisdom, no struggle between opposing counsels of perfection, no dynamic leadership towards a distant aim, but presently a friendly deep sense of life, a sense of current being, shared A deep power, against which no single assertive individual could prevail, something like a Quaker meeting, after Englehart and his party, already thrown out of their usual form by enforced abdication in favour of the promised Kingfisher, had gone impatiently away Only Rachel was left to represent the hard edge and she, in the end, admitted the vitalizing quality of the hour

To-day, being Sunday, will keep intact for several hours this morning sense of spring Sunday morning stands in eternity and gathers all its fellows from the past Now that it is here, it is no longer the last Sunday with Selina but an extension of all our Sundays together Until the late afternoon, when to-morrow will pour in over the surface of the hours

Across the featureless, blissful moment came a vision of the girl posed, her red gown glowing through the dark, clear for a second and then gone, but in the far distances of the afternoon the thought of her made a barrier beyond which nothing could be seen Even this last day had already passed out of Selina's hands

CHAPTER VI

OF course there was no one at the club at this unlikely hour, not even a resident sitting about with an air of being in possession. The well-fed members were resting in their rooms. In this long, empty drawing-room, with morning gone and the afternoon not yet begun, was the end of the world. Life far away, past and done with. The atmosphere of the room, coldly neutral, engulfed feelings and opinions and mocked at the illusions created by mere coming and going. It mocked and weighed and judged. And there was nothing to oppose to it. Nothing to do but stand alone, judged and condemned, here in this corner by the window, giving on to the square whose garden must be yielding a deep sense of spring. Spring going its independent way.

Turning from the window, she faced the open piano, contemplating the alien keys she had never touched and that held the secrets of those who had played upon them and had thwarted the aspirations of those who had strummed. And held the living sound of the music that was now tingling to her finger-tips. In a moment she was back within the strange centre of being she had left on a vain quest, ensconced behind its endless refusal to accept evidence. She stood very still within the stillness it made beneath the glad tumult awakened in her by the returning tide. There was no direct answer to the emptiness about her that still made its assertions. But there was statement. Just sanity reasserting itself after a mild shock? More than that. Her external being, standing here with finger-tips responsive to the challenge of the exposed keys, in no way represented the essential opposition. Yet it was with that consciously reflecting being that she felt the unchanging presence that now joined her in the world it had restored. Everything in the room had a quiet reality, and glancing through

the window she saw how the budding trees thrilled in the sunlight

Through the sound of her soft playing she heard the click of the door. Seemed herself to be outside that door, opening it upon music barely heard from another room and that now, subdued though it was, seemed by comparison with that distant sound to peal out in honour of someone entering in triumph. Holding to her theme, she planned to pass from its nearing end without a break to another that would hold her within this secret world that had opened so unusually from out the lowest point in the afternoon. But the intention gave emphasis to the movements of her hands and presently she was just carefully playing, sharing her music with someone crept cautiously into the room, one or other of the residents now probably hidden in a deep chair and presently to sound its thanks and say it loved music.

It was only because it could be no one else that she recognized this girl crouched on the floor at her side—looking as if she had blossomed from the air—as yesterday's figure in the rose-red gown, again producing the effect of being aware of the impression she made, and contemplating it in the person of the one upon whom it was being directed and also, to-day, offering it as something to be judged, like a 'work of art,' detachedly, upon its merits.

The mealy, turquoise blue of the delicately figured kimono was deep satisfaction, so also were the heavy beads, of curiously blended, opaque deep colours, hanging in a loop whose base, against the girl's knees, was clasped by twining fingers. Smoothly draped sheeny dark hair framed the flower-fresh oval face and heightened the 'jasmine' white of the column of neck. And this unknown loveliness was already radiating affection, patiently awaiting the fruit of a wondering stare, wordlessly, for fear of risking by sound or movement its own full effect.

When Miriam smiled, the girl dropped her beads and reasserted herself with an emphatic movement, defying or insisting or imploring, that left her face upturned as if for easier reading. And then her hands came forward, one ahead of the other, smallish womanish hands, not very expressive,

and dropped again to her knees. She was on her feet, had become a figure, fleeing, on soundless feet, down the long room whose social life, flowing back to it as she plunged lightly on slippered feet, with the wings of her kimono fluttering to the swiftness of her movement, through its lights and shadows, was turned to nothing, as if its being as a club-room had waited all along for this transfiguring moment.

Ensnared in a corner of the low settee, she was so retreated into dimness that her mocking little laugh made Miriam, following her down the room, half expect to find her transformed. The eager, coquettish little trill suggested endless tiresomeness. But the girl, somehow aware of the false sound, quenched it with another, a cooing, consoling, deprecating laugh-sound that made together with the first a single communication. In spite of her brave, amazing silence she found it necessary somehow to fill with her image the interval during which she was invisible.

'I'm not sure I should have recognized you,' said Miriam. At the sound of her own familiar voice a gulf seemed leapt. But of the one who spoke, come from afar to meet this strange girl, she knew nothing. Serenely she took the other corner of the settee, feeling as she sat down that she had embarked in sunlight upon an unknown quest.

With another of her swift movements the girl was on her knees, upright, her face held motionless towards the full light. Again Miriam surveyed. Something had gone. There was thought behind the lovely silent mask, and speech on the way.

'It's like a peach. Say it, say it.'

'It is,' said Miriam, admiring the girl's open appreciation of her own beauty, at this moment newly created for her in eyes into which she gazed as into a mirror.

'But not so *much*, since Basil.' She waited, eyebrows up and painfully drawn together. Communication was severed. Miriam realized, by its sudden withdrawal, that a moment ago the room had seemed filled with golden light giving an ethereal quality to all its contents. Now they stood distinct in a light that was dark and bitter and cold. Yet this girl was different from the women who at once begin to talk of their personal relationships, and though she felt her face grow weary in

anticipation of moving away from their two selves into the story of a life the girl shared with another, which, if it greatly mattered to her, robbed this strange meeting of its chief value, she felt her interest awake behind her suffering

'It spoils thee corners of thee mouth,' she whispered sadly 'They are never again so cleare and firm'

Another sadness, a revelation spreading itself abroad over all humanity, added its bitterness to the surrounding air, but before thought could beat back and find words, the girl said wistfully

'This makes a difference' You are repelled'

'No,' she said eagerly 'It makes no difference,' and within the glow of her admiration for sincerity she felt the lie turn to truth, and added 'with you'

'But yes,' she insisted, 'it must make some difference With all these women here, it would It divides me from them They are pewre I feel a barrier'

Miriam thought of the residents she knew by sight The pretty, sour-mouthed one who spent all her leisure at St Alban's, and was always quoting Father Stanton, the too-motherly widow and her hysterical daughter, the small dark woman who darted about and sang snatches of song in a way seeming to express nothing but impatience with every one within sight, the various 'workers' who were either too chatty and cheerful, stoically cheerful, a little mannish, or official and supercilious and thoroughly discontented

'Without telling them, I cannot get near them And to Englishwomen one cannot tell these things'

'But you've told me'

A sudden inner laughter glowed from the girl's face, compressing her lips and narrowing her eyes that for a second turned away in contemplation of a private source of amusement, as if some memory or knowledge of hers were being confirmed, and from which she returned fully aware that she held a soaring advantage, but not knowing the depth of repudiation she had aroused, to rival her strange spell, repudiation of the foreign quality of her intelligence, French intelligence with fixed wisdoms and generalizations

'Yes, you are English, that is the strange thing,' she remarked in a polite, judicial tone, 'and so *different*,' she added, head sideways, with an adoring smile and a low voice thrilling with emotion. Her hands came forward, one before the other, outstretched, very gently approaching, and while Miriam read in the girl's eyes the reflection of her own motionless yielding, the hands moved apart and it was the lovely face that touched her first, suddenly and softly dropped upon her knees that now were gently clasped on either side by the small hands.

Alone with the strange burden, confronting empty space, Miriam supposed she ought to stroke the hair, but was withheld, held, unbreathing, in a quietude of well-being that was careless of her own demand for some outward response. She felt complete as she was, brooding apart in an intensity of being that flowed refreshingly through all her limbs and went from her in a radiance that seemed to exist for herself alone and could not be apparent to the hidden girl.

Who now lifted her face and said, smiling a younger, simpler smile, relieved, gay, with a little flash of the teeth before the lips spoke, like a child who has dared and triumphed 'I *knew* You are *more* what I thought, than I thought you were,' and gazed, head thrown back, hands clasped firmly on the deserted knees, and laughed her early, cooing laugh and leapt lightly to her feet and was ensconced once more upon the deep settee.

'Are you living in London or just staying?'

'I do not know if I will stay. There are so many things here that make me not as I would be. After Paris.'

'For example?'

'I could give so many examples. Chiefly it is the way of living, the little things of every day. And there is your English food.' She shrugged her shoulders and draped her kimono more closely as if withdrawing from the chill discomforts of life in England, that yet she was living so easily in this quite well-run little club. The shadow her critical tone cast over the background of their meeting, over her London as she knew it, in makeshift poverty of which this girl had no experience, saddened Miriam, forcing her to realize that the wide separation of their circumstances would play its obstructive

part as soon as they reached personal details. She herself, her way of living, the lack in it of anything that could charm a fastidious little *grande dame* in the making, would presently be identified with the uncongenial London about to be left to its fate. But 'Basil' was an Englishman?

Yet, though so bravely determined to reveal herself at once and keep nothing back, she clearly disliked direct questions. Or, if not actually disliking them, received them with a ceremonial that made them seem crude, and therefore certainly offensive, to her. First silence and a fresh pose of her whole person, a plastic pose, studied and graceful, and a careful, conscious management of the accompanying facial effects that preceded her answer—a statement, seeming at first irrelevant and presently revealing consistency—so that her talk bore no resemblance, never would bear any resemblance, to the Englishwoman's well-bred incoherence—and contributing to her effect of being critically aloof from everything but her own power to charm.

Just as Miriam began clearly to realize both how very weary she could grow of the plastic poses and that she herself was not playing the part expected of her, the girl broke off and sank in a graceful heap on the floor, where she sat crouched and once more silently adoring.

Towards tea-time, it was only with an effort that she could remember whither she was bound. Her current life had grown remote and unreal. As empty and turned away and indifferent as the far corners of this club-room, so strangely free, as if deliberately kept free of intruders, for the hour during which she had sat enthroned and talking being 'drawn out' and set and kept upon a pinnacle and worshipped for wisdom and purity. Seeing herself reflected in the perceptions of this girl, she was unable to deny, in the raw material of her disposition, an unconscious quality of the kind that was being so rapturously ascribed to her. But it was not herself, her whole current self. It belonged to her family and her type, and for this inalienable substratum of her being she could claim no credit. Yet in being apparently all that was visible, and attractive, to this socially experienced and disillusioned and clear-eyed young

woman, it seemed to threaten her. She could feel, almost watch it coming forth in response to the demand, thoughtlessly and effortlessly, feel how it kept her sitting perfectly still and yet vibrant and alight from head to feet, patiently representing, authentic. And a patient sadness filled her. For if indeed, as her own ears and the confident rejoicing that greeted every word she spoke seemed to prove, this emerging quality were the very root of her being, then she was committed for life to the role allotted to her by the kneeling girl.

In the end, supplied bit by bit, by hints and responses, sometimes mere exclamations illuminating, by their ecstatic suddenness that which called them forth, with a portrait of herself in all its limitations, as she existed in the mind of the girl, it seemed almost as if this girl had come at just this moment to warn her, to give her the courage of herself as she was, isolated and virginal. Yet, as she stood at last taking leave of her in the centre of the twilight room, facing again her strange beauty gleaming in the space it illuminated, she was glad to be escaping back into the company of people who moved mostly along the surface levels and left her to herself.

CHAPTER VII

WITH so many small movables gone on, the strip of room looked exactly as it had done when the furniture was first brought in, and again, as she went candle in hand down the pathway of green linoleum, she felt with all its first freshness, as in the sacred days before the surrounding neighbourhood stated its misery, the deep, early morning charm radiating from the little polished bureau and its slender brass candlesticks, the long mirror in its dark frame and the moss-green enamel of the toilet set with its pools of light. And especially the long lasting of the early morning charm on that first Sunday morning, before the thunderstorm had brought the poet to his window with waving arms.

She would remember these rooms as early morning light pouring from the high window along the green pathway and reflected, in their different ways, by the bureau, the mirror, and the crockery the quiet deep bliss of it. Bliss that would remain unchanged and gradually spread its quality even over the shallow months since she had moved her bed away from the night-sounds of the court into the little back room, amongst Selina's battered sitting-room furniture from which there was no escape in looking up at the ancient painted ceiling or out through the small window whose dim, shabby curtains, faded and dusty, seemed to match the dismal waste between it and the opposite slum, and over all the memories of Flaxman's, crowding together, each in turn coming forward with its teasing question and merging again into the crowd with its question unanswered.

And they were going with her into the new, old life, the bureau and the moss-green crockery and the black-framed mirror. Somewhere in her vast house Mrs Bailey would find room for the things they would displace? She had not thought

of that, nor of any tiresome detail, either at Wimpole Street when Selina made her belated plea and she had improvised her plan and based it on a lie, or in going round to tell the delighted Mrs Bailey Had thought of nothing but going home to Tansley Street

She set her candle on the bureau and sat down to find her list of bills This was the end of bills and items In future there would be nothing but the weekly sum for Mrs Bailey, passing almost furtively from hand to hand, with a genuine pretence on both sides that there was between them no relationship of payer and paid To-morrow, she would be at home

In place of this large room, divided by the crash curtain—Selina should have curtain and linoleum and everything else they held in common—and the small sitting-room and huge attic, there would be one small, narrow room

But all round it, in place of the cooping and perpetual confrontations of Flaxman life, the high, spacious house whose every staircase she knew and loved in each of its minutest differences from its fellows, of shape and colour and texture and lighting, of everything that makes up the adventure of ascending and descending flights of stairs—absent in Flaxman's from all but the remote little top flight beyond the reach of the reek and murk coming up from the basement, absent because of the close pressure of the lives in the house and in the surrounding slum, lives she was powerless to change or to endure—and every room, where, extending even into those she had never entered, richly her own life was stored up

And the doors with their different voices in shutting or being slammed-to by the wind Would she remember Flaxman door-sounds after she had left? Glancing at the door which ended the long strip of her half of the room she tried in vain to remember its sound Yet, when she first settled in, it must have impressed itself and played its intimate part in the symphony of sounds belonging to her life with Selina She tried for the attic door upstairs and even that refused to return No indoor sounds would stay on with her from this house because after the first few weeks her senses had never been at home, had always been a little on the alert, uneasy, half-consciously

watchful for assaults from downstairs and from outside, pressing too closely and difficult to resist

But the sound of each of the Tansley Street doors came back at once, and some stood out clearly from the others. The dining-room door, quiet, slowly-moving because of its size and weight, closing solidly with a deep wooden sound, slamming, very rarely, with a detonation that went up through the house. The state bedroom behind it, whose door moved discreetly on its hinges over a fairly thickish carpet and shut with a light, wooden sound. The door of the little draughty room at the end of the passage, clapping abruptly to over its thin linoleum with a comfortless metallic rattle of its loose fastening. The upstairs drawing-room's softly, silkily closing door, a well-mannered, muffled sound, as if it were intent on doing its duty in such a way as not to interrupt the social life going on within. And, higher up, the heavy brown doors of the second-floor bedrooms, still with wooden knobs like those below, closing leisurely and importantly, seeming to demand the respect due to the prices of the rooms they guarded, and the rooms above, whose yellow, varnished doors shut lightly and quickly, one with a soft brassy click, very neat and final, one with a sharp rattle of its loose metal knob echoing over the linoleum-covered stairs and landings of the upper floors.

All beloved. For a moment she listened to the prolonged squeak, running cheerfully up the scale and ceasing suddenly as the door stood wide, that was the voice of her old garret. But the breathless midsummer heat and the cruel, hampering cold she had endured there in fireless winters and condoned and explained away and somehow exorcized, so long as they had been the inevitable prices of survival, came forward now to condemn the room that was no longer hers and she turned with joy and gratitude to hear the light, high sound, shut away, scarcely audible, of the remote door of the small strip of room beyond the turn of the stairs as they wound up to the attics. Heard it close, unbelievably, behind her and leave her ensconced, high above the quiet street. In the house, but not, too much, of it. Supported and screened by the presence of the many rooms that made the large house, each one occupied

by strangers who soon, just because she need establish with them no exacting personal relationship, would be richly and deeply her housemates, sharing the independent life of this particular house, its situation within London's magic circle, its early mornings, its evenings and nights, all bathed in the quietude of the comely street and blessed by the neighbourhood of the green squares at its either end

Freedom

Freedom for thought, when it made its sudden visits, to expand unhampered by the awful suggestions coming from the Flaxman surroundings To sit down unobserved, and endlessly free from interruption, at this little bureau that now could fulfil the promise for which it was bought

She became aware of her framed mirror on the wall behind her, reflecting, in its narrow length, her form seated in the shadowy candle-light she was so soon to leave for the cheerful blaze of gas, or the steady companionship of the reading-lamp that at Flaxmans' she had hardly used at all, and half turned to look into it and exchange over her shoulder a smile of congratulation with her reflected image

The glass was not clear Across her face, that should have shown in the reflected candle-light, was some kind of cloudy blur Holding up the candle she found lettering, large and twirly, thickly outlined as if made with chalk or moist putty, moving with a downward slope across the centre of the strip of glass Mystified—for who in the wide world could have had access to her room, or, achieving it, should be moved to deface her mirror in a manner suggesting it was for sale?—and disturbed by the unaccountable presence that had been silently witnessing, unpardonably mocking, it seemed to her as she pushed away the chair and stood aside to let the candle-light fall upon the strange apparition, her private rejoicings

'I love you,' it said

With the feeling of coming down and down from a far-away upper distance, a physical sensation of rhythmic descent down and down, her consciousness arrived in the moment and paused, looking out through the eyes of her body at the shadowy semblance left in the room the figure of the girl secretly and

swiftly coming and going, in outdoor garb, cloak or loose coat, something swaying and flowing with her movements, un-Englishly

She must have discovered the address at the club, come round here on an impulse, and immediately encountered Selina Selina, in her old dressing-gown and with a candle guttering in her battered candlestick, peering out into the darkness, a little suspicious of the foreign voice and the poses and the extraordinary request that must have followed their brief conversation. Or perhaps already dressed for her evening lecture, and therefore feeling relatively sporting and dare-devil and, at once won over, preceding her upstairs and admitting her for a moment to this room, alone, probably lighting for her this very candle, and coming in to blow it out again after she had shown her downstairs

With a swift blush, while she assured herself that in the dim light she would not have observed it, she wondered whether Selina had seen the writing on the mirror

CHAPTER VIII

SPARROWS were tweeting on the leads outside the office, and the servants had carried all the house-plants out into the lightly pittering rain. There was gold on the rain-wet leads and then grey for a while as again the rain fell, until once more its lessening drops were sunned to gold and ceased. The fresh smell of damp earth came in at the open door.

To-morrow morning, at dawn, if I happen—The bell of the wall-telephone sounded from its corner to which she went, away from her table within the freshness of the outer air and the radiance of morning light streaming in through the open door, across the short diagonal into the room's outer world, into the lesser light warmed by the yellow-gold wall-paper, into the flavourless, dry, house-air, and into sight, through the glass of the opposite door, of the stately perspective of staircase and high, shadowy hall and high archway nowadays austere, clear of Mrs Orly's striped oriental curtains with their unspeakable, pathetic, unforgettable tie-backs of transverse stripes, and the forehall leading along past the seated manservant to the dark wings of the closed door gloomily asheen beneath its clouded fanlight—with only the beginning of a friendly movement of her mind towards patients in their wealthy homes, and to this useful link between them and the house extending above and below her perched room, and lately more than ever beloved because with no release in sight she yet seemed already to be living in it in retrospect.

So that it was herself and not quite herself who lifted the receiver and looked down the long staircase up and down which she had run so many thousands of times, each time, even when fatigue or summer heat retarded her steps, with an emotion independent of that aroused by whatever made the journey necessary, sometimes so strong as temporarily to make

her forget her errand, sometimes reduced by a particular urgency almost to nothing, but always arriving the moment she started and continuing—making the experience of being on the stairs with the wide eloquent spaces above and below and all about her set in motion by movement, and the beings of the many inmates, and even her own being, momentarily further than usual from her mind and therefore in clearer focus, something distinct from the rest of her life in the house—until she arrived at her destination with a sense of return to a world from which she seemed to have been absent for much longer than the time required for the journey

Pretty Mrs Ffoljambe on a visit the year Persimmon won the Derby held up, by a patient being interviewed in the hall, and dancing with impatience on this landing that to her was nothing but a stage on the journey from her bedroom down through the professional part of the house to the cheerful den far away beyond the back of the hall through which her arrived, gay friends had just charged in a silence as unnatural as her own

Glad to escape from her, and her universe where women were judged by their looks and men by their incomes, I whispered, with simulated gallantry, I 'll hurl myself downstairs and find out for you Thanks hawfully, she said, but don't break a limb

Into the receiver came the voice of Mrs Orly Her telephone voice thin and hurried, its usual note of anxious solicitude increased by her incurable impatience with the mechanism, and whispering, as if still she were living here in the house and conveying, through the hall speaking-tube, some urgent message to her husband in his surgery Her whole self came through, the image of her in hurried speech, the sallow little face worried and frowning, the sweet, radiant eyes a little clouded

Intent upon the little figure on tiptoe at the wall-telephone fixed in the roomy hall at a level arranged for the convenience of her tall, unreflecting menfolk, Miriam had missed the meaning of the first words, but the anxious voice went on and she felt all the warmth of her being gather itself to sound in her reply to the flustered little phrases

And when she returned to her table, the vision of the evening, glowing so pleasantly from the midst of next week, owed the whole of its charm to the certainty of the pervasive little presence and the perfect incoherence that so often in the past had provoked her to be unkind

Whilst going on with her work she saw the vast ex-studio in the Orlys' Hampstead retreat approached, after dinner (during which hearing 'all about Oberland' would have been a few questions colliding with each other across the table and answered at cross-purposes to the accompaniment of family wrangling that held no core of bitterness, and then a little of Mr and Mrs Orly's reminiscences and, filling the spaces between the different consciousnesses moving towards each other and failing to meet, the beauty of Switzerland, lingering in the mind of each one), through the fern-lined, high glass corridor, looking at first gloomy because of its size and the way, above the shaded, standard lamps, the darkness went up towards the cold sheen of the glass roof, and presently becoming a continuation of the old den, though here the Orly voices caught up and echoing in the enormous room sounded less assured, and all they stood for much more remote, than on the old background

And some time during the evening, since the scholarly aunt is to be there and will want to hear about Reich's last lecture, ideas will creep in

'The great unassailed inland empires slumbering in superstition, producing grotesque art and no thought The Aegean islanders, always on the *qui vive*, fighting for their lives, producing Homer Spreading westwards Greece The little Hebrews on their strip of coast, living dramatically, producing a great literature The Romans a military camp, spreading and conquering, making Empire and Law Their spiritual descendants the island English, sailors, soldiers, merchants, and, presently, the world's greatest poet And now asleep in prosperity while in the midst of Europe rises a brutal menace'

His last words 'Ladies and gentlemen, I am a Hungarian patriot Germany prepares for war Europe knows it Before this century is ten years old, England will know it Perchance too late If I can open your eyes, I shall not have

lived in vain You, and you alone, can save Europe, can save my native land who will receive, on the morning war is declared, a post card bidding it cease to exist'

If I can put all that *clearly* before their eyes, there will be silence for a moment and Mrs Orly's voice will sound into the midst of the workings of their various minds, asking a question about Reich, compelling even a European situation to behave, to serve the purposes of kindly living

Mr Orly will quote *Anglo-Saxon Supremacy*, and sigh gustily and look about for his African tobacco-pouch, to carry off his embarrassment over his own emotion And Mr Leyton will intone 'My house and thy house are half the world's goods' and will remark that if the old boy turns out to be right, the Boer War has taught us we're a C₃ nation just about in time, and cross his legs and look stern and capable

And the walls will have grown transparent to gloomy threats and the high roof ceased to be a shelter Until Mr Orly sings *Gunga Din* and *My Snowy-breasted Pearl* and their house becomes itself again

But long before that, *to-morrow morning, at dawn, if I happen to wake, I shall breathe the freshness of morning from a Tansley Street window*

From within the deep distances enclosed by the railings of the squares, the life-breath of the trees would steal towards her from either end of the street

Here, going on with her work in the sane morning light, with rain-damp earthy scents streaming in from the potted mould of the house-plants, she felt the heart's ease of going home with a deeper rapture than in yesterday's excited twilight, felt an actual melting and streaming away from below her heart of the oppression that must have been gathering there through all the time at Flaxman's

Whatever else awaited her at Tansley Street, these moments waited there And daily moments of return to a solitude that whenever she crossed the threshold of her empty room ceased to be solitude

The gentle burr of Mr Hancock's summoning bell took her

eyes to the clock as she rose to answer it. Mr Cleeke, narrow head, narrow, cold voice, narrowly specialized mind, must still be here. Going upstairs she heard in her mind the refined, undulating, deliberately challenging voice of Mrs Cleeke. Like so many of the wives of professional husbands, she seemed to be both her husband's guardian and a masked being who betrayed, by the emphasis of her statements, how little of her inward self was behind what she said. An eager, busy, well-dressed ghost, fearful of anything that seemed to threaten the ideas he represented. Wearing her husband's attainments as a personal decoration, she was really indifferent to the system within which she spent her outward life, aware of a world where it had no importance, perhaps taking refuge in it when she was alone. She might say briskly 'One must be alone at times' or, 'I'm quite *fond* of my own society, occasionally'. But the solitude this kind of woman suggested would be populous with humorous, common-sense reflections on life and humanity. Never quite at home in solitude, she and her kind missed the essential both in society and in solitude: the coming to life of the surrounding air, the awareness that within it is a life-breath, in-pouring. Not one of these women would be passionately shocked by the intruder who comes in vocally, assuming there is no one in the room but its visible occupant, or by the person who looks anxiously from one to another of a momentarily silent gathering, in wait for the next move.

Crossing the room to reach her corner, she felt the glow of agreement coming from the window-space where Mr Hancock stood beside his cabinet mixing amalgam with the remains of his most delighted smile wavering below the calm, obstinate brow and Mr Threede at ease in the chair facing the stained glass window's flitting brown butterflies with the remains of his *quod erat* half-smile still creasing his clever face.

'And the sooner the general public can be made to realize it the better,' said Mr Hancock gravely, with a final forceful sweep of the spatula, and turned to pack the patient's mouth with absorbents.

Dreadnoughts

Can it be true that my assignation with to-morrow's dawn owes its security to Dreadnoughts?

After the dawn, if Mag and Jan were still at Kenneth Street, the first Sunday morning in the old house, the part beginning just after breakfast and probably finding her feeling she had never gone away

The Flaxman time would roll up and vanish, for there would be nothing to recall it. She and Selina had left no mark on each other, exchanged no thoughts, no confidences, not even small gifts

Perrance Perrance's alabaster finger, packed in her luggage, impossible to abandon or give away, a reminding, undesired tribute to what in his mistaken eyes she stood for, something bred in her, remaining, friend and enemy by turns. Selina had seen and been won by it at first and then lost sight of it because she called out the self that was opposed to all its standards

The strange girl had seen it and nothing else at all. Had insisted on it. And left it a message at *Flaxman's* Am-a-bel, calling herself by her own name, as if at once insisting on her smallness and pathos, in a great world, and her equality to all its forces, had triumphed, without knowing what she was doing, over the impossibility of breaking in at Flaxman's and, unless she should suddenly disappear, would for ever represent it, the whole of it complete in all its details, lying behind the small glimpse she was now carrying about as part of her knowledge of her new friend

Perhaps she would disappear. Go back to Paris as she had hinted. There was no link between her and Tansley Street. And need be none for many days

'The fact is, we've been asleep'

'The British bull-dog, eh, snoring in his comfy kennel?'

'Exactly. A little wider, please'

After to-night, after more or less publicly settling in, it would be as though she had never been away and to-morrow morning—thanks to Dreadnoughts?—she would hear the familiar house-sounds and, although the toneless echo of St Pancras bells would no longer thud in her chimney—drawing

her seeking glance, when she was too preoccupied to remember she could not *see* the sounds, towards its small black aperture that after each thump held a fumbling rumour as if something were moving visibly in the sooty cavity—in that fourth-floor room she would hear them as clearly as before those first, new, clear, morning notes swinging one by one steadily down the scale and again and again and again until presently she forgot them, ceased to pay attention to the single sounds while still aware of their presence in the increased quality of the light in the room, and presently was reminded that the bells were still at their task by the sudden dead stop, announcing the hymn-tune that broke into the stillness with such appealing lack of confidence, tapping out its bell-notes slowly and carefully, like an untrained musician picking out a tune with one finger, each note sweetly, gently, touching the Sunday morning air, and at the end of the last line the uncertain upward dab at a top note never fully reached, left standing high in the air, perfectly, satisfyingly flat, for too brief a second, so that all one's being, in order not to miss its perfection, in order just to accompany and catch it before its profane comment was covered by the urgent crashing of the final cascades, had to become an attentive ear

And all the other street-sounds The pealing voice of the newspaper boy would still come up from far enough below to describe to her mind's eye the height of the confronting rows of quiet grey balconied houses and, with the briefness of its stay, accompanied by the painty crackling open of large front doors, low-toned words clearly audible, calling up a picture of boy and buyer pleasantly in league, and the quiet satisfied wooden flump of each leisurely closed door, to tell of its perfect length between tree-filled square and tree-filled square

Revelling in every single, blessed sound indoors and out and then, for a moment, undecided between one and another of the many ways of spending the vast morning No need to unpack Mrs Bailey would only smile, indulgently, if her luggage hung about for weeks, for ever Oh, *home*

If Mag and Jan were still at Kenneth Street, whatever she should decide to do would be done in an interval that would

owe part of its secure endlessness to the state of mind brought about by the forgettable certainty of going to them in the afternoon, without going outside the surrounding presence of Central London. That was the change, the only change there would be, that Mag and Jan had gone away outside. And it was not essential. Perhaps it was good.

For those old Sundays with them were left perfect, an everlasting possession. In spite of the curious occasional flaw the way the girls agreed, amidst all their complete differences, in a half-mocking, *humorous* indulgence for all she tried to express to them. Intolerable, sometimes terrifying the presence of a secret, magnanimous mockery, that included themselves, included everything and everybody, and was sustained by a sort of taunting attitude towards life that was perfectly inexplicable. But on the whole those Sundays were perfection. Perfect at their time, so that often she and they, though Jan not so much, being older, and more lugubrious about the future and old age, had wished and said they wished, and without damaging the moment, that for ever they could go on living the lives they then were living.

Certain days stood warmly in her heart, gathering about them all the others that would need a special effort to call up, and all of one quality that amid innumerable variations had *never* varied the three of them, their clearly defined differences, origins, characters, beliefs, and a fourth, something that was there in the room and that depended upon their being together, and being together at the heart of London and immensely at leisure, without past or future. So that anecdotes, stories of the past, and speculations as to what might lie ahead—happening only when, for some reason, one or other of them was not quite there, or was withdrawn into some private pre-occupation—drove it away.

Some of these Sundays, some of the best, had been bought at shameful prices. Lies that had yet brought no punishment, but the reward of increased eagerness on the part of the friends she had ruthlessly failed at the last moment.

One stood out from the rest with the guiltiest prelude the going to look in on them on that grilling August Saturday,

leaving her bag ready packed for the long-promised week-end with the Pernes at Banbury Park that had been an enchanting prospect ever since the arrival of Miss Deborah's unexpected affectionate letter breaking the years of silence since Miss Haddie's death. And all the more charming because Miss Haddie would not be there deliberately representing Church Christianity and doing her reproachful best so openly to be a good influence, and failing because of her sad, soured immaturity, her *fear*, and cold dark jealousy. Only sunny Miss Deborah and frivolous Miss Jenny and Wordsworth House empty of north London girls. And Miss Haddie's death far enough away for them to be their gay, profane little off-duty selves little Christian gentlewomen of the last century, mighty without knowing it, and heavenly company.

And as the visit approached, it had become not only their charming idea but also escape for two nights from the stifling attic, and all through the morning languor after a sleepless night she had had before her eyes their cool suburban sitting-room, its open windows letting in the jingle-jingle, plock-plock, of the soulless north London trams that would sound, as she sat with them about the little tea-table and its old silver and fragile porcelain, the Gobelin screen somewhere near, and listened to their delicate chirrupings and chucklings, somehow less incongruous than on that first afternoon so many years ago.

It was midday. The girls both just back from their respective offices, blissful, amidst the disorder of settling down for the week-end. Jan cooking, in a crape dressing-gown, her head contradicting her body, boyishly intellectual with its short sculptured hair. Mag in knickers and camisole, her west-country, Celtic hair a cloud about her face and neck, cleaning all her shoes set in a row. Chanting voices that did not cease when she came in. And both faces flushed and perspiring in the fearful London heat and the extra heat, the savoury heat of their cooking. And a sudden home-sickness for them and for their sweltering little rooms seeming, at that moment, more attractive, and, because of the deep release they brought to her spirit, *cooler*, than any garden could be. There seemed a special importance, that had grown stronger, turned into

something that could not be missed, when Mag began laying her spells

'Trains, week-ends, what *are* they? I *ask* you, *what*?' Yet preoccupied, utterly, blissfully preoccupied Wanting not so much that I should stay, as that by not going away I should preserve a familiar pattern

'Having shown yourself, you *can't* leave us Jan! Can she leave us? *Est-ce qu'elle peut uns verlassen?*'

'*Nein! Bestimmt! In Gottes Rath*'

'*Ewigkeit, Amen*' And then, the shoes finished, as she went busily from room to room so that her voice sounded from various distances, its chanting carelessness proclaiming her indifference, but with such intoxicating *attractiveness*, because it revealed her soul's eye set upon her week-end, its succession of moments and events as they appeared, secretly, to her alone and sent their joy into her voice as she moved about in their setting, sharing it with Jan, who saw it with the eye of one born and bred in another country, always to some extent as foreign, as something she had achieved, but that yet remained outside herself

'We insist, child, on you, or your hat Go, if you must But your hat Stays here We will suspend it By its velvet strings To the mantelpiece In front of the archdeacon We will regard'—and here she had stood near at hand, exultantly radiating her charm, through warm west-country eyes and smiling lips, and her easily flowing affection, so sunny, having for its nearest objects her army of sisters and brothers, all safely at a distance and yet securely to be met on holidays she could, without discomfort, just manage to afford, and the half-critical indulgence that was beginning to be her settled attitude, in agreement with Jan, some kind of formula that fitted their scheme of things—'its transparent, silky crinoline Its roses With their help And *torrents* of trrr-anspiration We 'll enduah'

Jan, having come in from the kitchen to stand at her side, with her so different, German smile, blondly radiant, denied by the little twist of her closely held lips expressing her bitter comment on life, held always in reserve and implacable

'I Shall wear the hat'

And they had stood like a tribunal And reluctantly, taking leave not so much of them personally as of the condensation of their common London life in all its retrospects and perspectives, specially, it seemed at that moment, represented by this torrid week-end she might have shared with them, she had privately decided, while mentally they left her and again took possession of their goods, the security of their isolation together for the immense interval between one week's work and another, that she must hold to her going But in moving out to the landing and the sight of the descending stairs, the banishment from this innermost depth of the rich deeps of London seemed not only unendurable, but foolish and needless As if to go, however morally and stoically, was to commit an outrage she would regret to the end of her days Her thoughts, for a moment, had touched the waiting Pernes and brought a pang of guilt that was nothing beside the deep, everyday joy that poured back when Mag, coming from her room, said quietly, simply, with a touch of anxious pleading making her voice undulate

'You're *not* going, Miriam? Don't go'

'Of course I'm not going'

'She's not going, Jan' Mag had turned her head towards the kitchen without removing her gaze, but in her level tone was triumph and malicious amusement, tempting me to say it was not entirely on their account I was staying, and in her smile a delighted anticipation of Jan's horrified amazement Jan had almost tiptoed out from the kitchen and murmured, when she arrived, with her crooked smile reduced to its least shadow

'Not? Really not?' And their sense of the enormity had come from them in waves

'No I don't want to go away I don't want to wander out into bleak black blank north London You can't imagine, even on a tropical day, how *cold* it is' She had carried their thoughts away, driven them away, from the personal aspects, made them enthusiastically see the necessity, and it was Jan who suggested the telegram And there was an interval,

before it was sent, every one separate again, and chanting, and blissful. And over that afternoon and evening had lain the deepest spell they had known together, for her and for Mag at any rate, and their happiness and the presence of the exaggerated weather had distracted Jan, insulated her for a while somewhere quite near the unchanging present.

The twilight had come to them all, coming home from Slater's, a shared, oh, surely that must have been a fully shared event and marvel, immense summer twilight, heavenly refreshment, sky swept clear of its blaze of light and heat, grown high and visible and kind, buildings and people larger and more kindly than by day. Such an immense turning of day, personal, making to everybody a vast communication, deepening into dusk as we walked abreast, three little figures with dusk-white faces and dusk-dark garments, causelessly exulting, towards the morning which came at once, for I slept a rich sweet sleep that paid no heed to the sultry oven atmosphere of my room.

And that Sunday morning for the first time I went round to them before breakfast out into the early summer morning, into all my summer mornings right back to that morning when I first noticed a shadow lying on the *wrong side* of a gable. Across the silent early freshness of the square, feeling the remains of night and dawn in the deep scent and colour of its leaves, drinking its strange rich lonely air that seemed in the heart of London to come from a paradise as deep as any to be found in distant country lanes and woods. It sent a breath of its pure freshness down the little asleep brown street and on to their doorstep, till I forgot it and thought only of them, and in a moment, having found them and yesterday still going on and holding us together, I was out again, and now, the longest part of that day that seems so vast a stretch is the moment of being out again on those steps, going down them, with all the on-coming hours in my heart and their little milk-jug in my hand for ever, for the whole of that summer that seemed then to approach from earth and sky and, as if it were a conscious being, to greet me coming down the steps in my rose-hat with loosely tied strings, and, as I paused in delight, to claim me as

part of its pageant, so that in that moment my sense of summer was perfect and I knew it was what I had stayed in London to meet

The saliva-tube ceased its busy gurgling. Gave out its little click of glass on glass as Mr Hancock bent across and hitched it over the rim of the spittoon. 'Now rinse, please' He was at the far side of the chair filling the tumbler as the patient came upright mopping his lips, returning to his cold world and his cold use of its words. An emotional groan, facetious tribute to his gagged endurance, a reflective sniff prelude to speech, but already Mr Hancock, appointment-book in hand, had begun the dismissal. In a moment she would be alone with him in that world of silent or speechful communion that was so powerful still to set her other worlds at a distance. His least word, and Mr Threele had left his thoughts flowing and himself conversational, would evoke the whole of it and break the current of her thoughts.

The speaking-tube clicked, and he came quickly back from his leave-taking across the room to answer it and would perhaps have the next patient sent up at once.

'Yes?' he inquired, abstractedly listening into the tube and, in reply to the answer, 'Yes,' again, informatively. It was not the patient, a partner with a question, perhaps wanting him for a consultation, or one of the mechanics needing instructions or wanting him in the workshop. The second question was lighting his face with the glimmer of a smile, and she slowed her gathering-up of instruments to make a silence for talk that might last long enough to see the bracket cleared and herself escaped until the patient should be in the chair.

'Thank you' He turned to face her with his full, delighted beam. 'Lord Wilderham to see you,' he said and paused for a moment, enjoying his role, and moved away to his writing-table with a deliberate air of abdication and withdrawal, enjoying the little comedy.

She had smiled her response to it while their eyes had met and she had taken the unexpected Lord Wilderham and his unknown needs under her wing, and was free now to go off at once for her excursion into the far-off world represented by

his name So far off and unrelated to her own and yet so deeply loved for its floods of golden light, the various rich beauty of its backgrounds and the fresh deeps of high surrounding air that blessed its innocent inhabitants unnoticed, that she seemed to hold a place in it by natural right, and to touch it for a moment just now was an extension rather than a disturbance of her blissful state She went down to the waiting-room, feeling her spirit's joy the fuller for her errand, flowing more freely through her limbs and to the tips of her toes that scarcely felt the ground beneath them as they skimmed along the hall

Lord Wilderham rose from a chair in the window-space beyond the table where held-up patients sat trying to read In a moment she was at his side and as sharply aware, while they exchanged greetings, of his agitation and distress as if they had been her own, and stood poised, accepting and receiving and longing to remove them, glad to radiate the deep peace that to-day was so fully at her command, till the pleasant, woeful, bloodshot blue eyes moved from hers to glance towards the room's silent occupants

The opening of the door, upon a released patient greeting, and immediately greeted by, someone risen from the table, made a solitude for them in the retreat where they were sharing his eloquent misery

Through his staccato incoherencies—as he stood shamed and suppliant, and sociable down to the very movement of his eyelashes, and looking so much as if he had come straight from a racecourse that her mind's eye saw the diagonal from shoulder to hip of the strap of his binoculars and upon his head the grey topper that would complete his dress, and the gay rose in his buttonhole—she saw his pleasant life, saw its coming weeks, the best and brightest of the spring season, broken up by appointments to sit every few days for an indefinite time enduring discomfort and sometimes acute pain, and facing the intimate reminder that the body doesn't last, facing and feeling the certainty of death

This man would risk his life in the hunting field, in wild and lonely distant parts of the earth, but the slow elaborate

torments of modern dental surgery had broken his spirit But not his courtesy Half of his distress was over the enormity of breaking appointments His decision to endure for the present no more root-dressings and preparations for crowns, no more long, long, tap-tap-tapping in of gold fillings, was desperate and bought at the price of genuine moral discomfort 'What *are* we to say to Hancock?'

She sent him away reassured, with all his appointments safely cancelled and perfect understanding and forgiveness faithfully promised, but as through the open front door she saw him spring into his jaunty, holland-blinded private hansom—and in spirit felt his relief as it bowled gaily off down the street through the spring sunlight towards the world of flowered balconies and high grey houses beautiful within all at their best moment, the spring flowers in house-rooms and club-rooms giving out, with their scents, the essence in advance of the weeks to come right down to Ascot and Goodwood and Cowes, seen in perspective by all the genuinely participant *habitués*, and of these he certainly was one, as a single continuous collaborated jollification, the annual festival, centring in London and London's summer robbed by wealth of its discomforts, of the entire Oberland house-party—he was no longer just one of the social elect, but also a pathetic fugitive Behind the merrily jingling hansom ran the shadow of death Easily forgotten in the midst of the secure profane gaiety of wealthy social life, where it is possible even for weaklings and the timid to lose and identify themselves with the group and draw from it daily a dose of vicarious strength, but always there

He had fled from cessation, and the sense, brought by those moments in the chair when publicly, in one's own hearing and that of another, one's hardest tissues, mysteriously stricken, are ground away, of bodily failure and ultimate dissolution From the witnessed, audible destruction that brings it so closely home Neglected teeth may be uncomfortable, sometimes agonizing But they are a personal secret, easily forgotten in the long intervals

Everybody, nearly every single person in the western world, except some of the middle European rye-bread-eating peasant-

tries, ravaged to some extent by dental caries. And still doctors scarcely ever looked at patients' mouths. And even dentists seemed to feel that all would be well if only the public and the medical profession could be awakened to the necessity for wholesale, regular dental treatment for everybody: school clinics. Enlightened practical common-sense people, hygienists, and public health enthusiasts, pioneers, talking glibly and calmly about the great future, once they were set going, of school dental clinics, never hearing in the very word the cold metallic click of instruments, never imagining the second-rate men who would accept these poorly paid jobs and handle the scared children. And even if they were all the equals of Mr Hancock and everybody were skilfully and gently treated. What then? It would make no difference to the truth: death attacking western civilization by the teeth.

Civilization, she told herself going slowly upstairs, and the helpless, wild, unconscious shriek of a patient coming round from nitrous oxide in a downstairs surgery seemed to her the voice of the western world in its death-throes, depends upon the stability of molars. No longer stable. That is why dentistry, the despised and rejected amongst the healing arts, is a revelation where medicine is a blind. Medicine chases symptoms, checks one disease and sees another increase. Total result: nil. Dental surgery treats symptoms that remain in place and do not change their form. Is therefore in a position to recognize that treatment *does not cure*. Civilization. Disease. And treatment growing all the time more and more elaborate. Nightmare: increasing armies of doctors trained, and in honour bound, even if they themselves, to say nothing of the helplessly onlooking relatives, are revolted by the processes, to 'keep life going to the last possible moment by every available means,' and the fearful array, for ever increasing, of drugs and appliances that can drag the dying back to consciousness and torment.

The ancient crack, where London grime had collected, in the jamb of the glass door of her room confirmed her gloomy reflections and challenged the skylit brightness upon which the door opened. But in vain, in vain. The sweet fresh air from the opposite open door flowed into her nostrils. Her

being went forth to meet it Here, within the air, far within this breath of life with the sun on its spring moisture, was rescue from all the gloom in the world Flight, like Lord Wilderham's? He to his daily Oberland, she to her morning air? No There was an answer, a personal answer and assurance somewhere within the deeps of this living air not all the black evidence of human history could prevail against it In light and darkness it was there It was a touch It conveyed the touch of a living, conscious being

The silent light, sharply signalling amongst the mountains, had been a message, but this low, sweet English air was an embrace

The coming end of to-day's morning tapped stealthily on her mind and began to spread its influence Just enough time in hand for all that remained to be done With a deep sigh that brought to her eyes a smile of salutation, she sat down at her table and gathered together the scattered letters and cheques and felt time at once resume its deep, morning quality, and turned to greet Hawkins come quietly in from the basement workshop for the mechanics' wages with the morning in his eyes The sunlight would now be striking in through the barred basement skylight Above the horrid gold coins, they met in silent agreement and exchanged their differently worded tributes, and parted with the cunning smiles of conspirators enriching their secret by leaving it unspoken

A glance at her clock showed its hands met on noon and, propped against its side, a letter come by the mid-morning post and placed carefully there, clear of the table's litter, by Eve, addressed to herself In a strange hand Queer staccato pen-strokes, sloping at various angles, with disjointed curves set between *Amabel*

A mass of small sheets, covered, without margins Strange pattern of curves and straight strokes rapidly set down Each separately Gaps not only between each letter but also between the straight and the curved part of a single letter Letters and words to be put together by the eye as it went along

She reckoned the cost of reading the whole the sacrifice of part of a Saturday afternoon to work that after this invasion of

her unprepared consciousness might go at a dragging pace. Glancing through the pages she found some, in a larger and still more hurried hand, where no single word showed its meaning directly. Between each letter of each word was as much space as between the words they were supposed to compose. Yet each was expressive, before its meaning appeared. Each letter, carelessly dashed down, under pressure of feeling, was a picture, framed in the surrounding space.

When meanings were discovered, they sounded, as if spoken.

It was this strange, direct, as if spoken communication, punctuated only by dashes sloped at various angles like the sharp, forcible uprights of the script, and seeming to be the pauses of a voice in speech, that was making the reading of this letter so new an experience. From its enchantment part of her mind was still held aloof by its strangeness, inquiring, considering. Her eye, not yet accustomed, kept pausing over the expressiveness of the new words attaching themselves to those already read, moving as well as sounding while they came, set together by her eye, to their proper meaning.

Alive. These written words were alive in a way no others she had met had been alive. Instead of calling her attention to the way the pen was held, to the many expressivenesses of a given handwriting, apart from what it was being used to express, instead of bringing as did the majority of letters, especially those written by men, a picture of the writer seated and thoughtfully using a medium of communication, recognizing its limitations and remaining docile within them so that the letter itself seemed quite as much to express the impossibility as the possibility of exchange by means of the written word, it called her directly to the girl herself, making her, and not the letter, the medium of expression. Each word, each letter, was Amabel, was one of the many poses of her body, upright as a plant is upright, elegant as a decorative plant, supporting its embellishing curves just as the clean uprights of the letters supported the curves that belonged to them.

And these word-making letters so swiftly flung on to the marginless page, substituting their individual shape for the letter-shape that she now realized had a limiting effect upon

what was expressed therein, were seeming to explain and justify the poses to show them for so long already habitual in this girl's young life that although they pleased her and were to her the movements of a dance, they expressed her without hindrance. She admired as she took them, called attention to them. Impersonally, as she called herself by name

'Isn't—E-g-y-p-t—a beautiful word?'

Beautiful? If it were, she was tried in the balance and found wanting. Amabel stood turned away from her, posed in contemplation of something she could not see, so that for her own contemplation only the pose remained.

French. The Frenchwoman, judging, selecting for approval and, by her pose, holding both herself and any one contemplating her in reverence before what she perceived—person, thing, idea. According to some standard that for her was infallible, Amabel collected, as she went along through life.

But this letter, moving breathlessly, staccato, was more English than French. Without her spoken accent, now that she was turned away and her voice no longer heard, it was English altogether.

Egypt. Neither the sound nor the sight of the word was lovely. Written, with its three differently tailed letters properly joined, it was unmanageable—the tails competed. In the whole written language surely no word was more difficult to beautify. The opening sound uglier even than 'cheese,' the pouting spit of the conclusion—hopeless.

Yet she singled it out, pausing before it, offering it. Mystery.

Returning, from scribbling in various styles of handwriting the difficult combination, she gazed once more at the word on the page and saw that as written by the girl it was not a word at all. It was a picture, a hieroglyph, each letter lovely in itself. Beautiful, yes, and suggesting all its associations more powerfully than did the sight of the word written closely.

Written as she wrote it, it was expressive exactly as her script was expressive—a balance of angles and curves. Like the words traced on the mirror. It was their expression, which was Amabel's, as much as what they had said, that had so moved her.

'Forgive—I watched you—in your little English clothes—go across the square—oh, my lady—my little—you terrified my heart—I hold it out to you—my terrified heart—in my two hands——'

Real Reality vibrating behind this effort to drive feeling through words The girl's reality appealing to her own, seeing and feeling it ahead of her own seeings or feelings that yet responded, acknowledged as she emerged from her reading, in herself and the girl, with them when they were together, somehow between them in the mysterious interplay of their two beings, the reality she had known for so long alone, brought out into life

The phrase scrawled beneath the signature gradually grew clear 'I wrote, with your *soap*!'

Alarmed by this almost terrifying resourcefulness, Miriam put the letter aside and turned to her work

To-morrow morning, if I happen to wake

But now to-morrow morning and all the visible circumstances of her life had retreated to inaccessible distance, leaving her isolated with this girl

Suddenly, punctually isolated, as once she had been with Eleanor, and, again this time, just as everything about her had become a continuous blossoming

CHAPTER IX

AGAIN the side-door of a small restaurant in a narrow street
Again a dingy waiter leading the way up an ill-lit staircase
Again the conflict between her desire to be a sympathetic presence and her resentment of his ignorance of her perfect awareness of the conflict in him, between his bourgeois scruples and his secret, newcomer's delight in what he had called his 'slum' Again a distracting preoccupation with the world-wide vision of harpy disreputability offering facilities to the well-to-do And again, more clearly than all, her whole being set against the plan that last week had perfectly foiled itself without instructing him

Coercion The unpardonable crime

Unless he should realize that, and make a convincing recantation, he would wreck this occasion as he had wrecked all the others

It was his worst fault ?

The thought occurred to her, coming as if from outside her mind and gleaming for an instant in the murky darkness, that presently she might discreetly discuss this subject with him He might listen in the way he sometimes had done when suddenly and irrelevantly she said something with all the force of her nature And this particular certainty was perhaps her strongest social certainty

Philosophizing Well, it was what she most wanted, to remove a barrier of which he was aware without understanding its nature It would be difficult, almost impossible, in a half-lit, shamefaced room Perhaps the same room Whose features, in memory, had already attained a kind of beauty

But to-night the journey ended in a brightly lit sitting-room with table laid And instantly the evening was endless They were alone, in endless time

Piling her outdoor things upon a sheeny shamefaced arm-chair in a dark corner near a window through the slats of whose dilapidated Venetian blinds came the bluish light of a street lamp, she felt the remains of the day's preoccupations fall away and strength return, flowing in from the promise of leisure, making her hope she was less tired than she felt. Far away from him and from her surroundings her spirit seemed to flee, demanding peace, and to-night, at no matter what cost in apparent idiocy or ill-humour, she *would* reach that central peace, go farther and farther into the heart of her being and be there, as if alone, tranquilly, until fully possessed by that something within her that was more than herself. If not, if she remained outside it, if he succeeded in making her pretend, though he never knew she was pretending, to be an inhabitant of his world, then again they would squabble and part.

As they both came forward into the central light and he rounded off the tuneless humming that had accompanied his disrobing and had been meant to signal self-possession, with a cheerful cadenza on a tone increased in fullness like that of an opera orchestra while the hero enters, and still said no word, she felt time and space open out between them, infinitely available the gift of last week's evening, of their first evening of being alone and inaccessible.

And paused in deep gratitude to life and to him, just short of the lit table, and turned away to the mirror with her hands to her hair as though arranging it. Immediately his humming broke forth anew, this time to answer her silent abstraction, to tell her they were *both* tranquilly at home and at leisure.

Gazing into the depths of the mirror's fly-blown damp-mottled reflection of a dark curtain screening a door in the opposite wall, she was aware of herself there in the picture, lit from behind, obstructing the light that presently again would lie across the mirror when she turned to join the party him, and herself representing to him a set of memories amongst other sets of memories. A set covering about ten years of his life, covering the period that had seen him emerge from obscurity to celebrity in his world that was so alien to her own.

In and out of every year of his ascent her life had been woven

CHAPTER XIV

'TICKERS,' announced the secretary, peering down the hall over the tops of his glasses, 'will be half a crown and two and six' Realizing his mistake before the general laughter broke forth, he led it and sat down, beaming his delight The old, cosy, family party atmosphere, so deprecated by Wells

Now here was the man she had always wanted to hear and had somehow always missed and now was regarding with a detachment not far removed from indifference No one henceforth could show her the socialist mind, whether scholarly and philosophical, poetic or witty, grown all over with the sweet herbs of kindness or flaunting the proud red blossoms of righteous indignation, as anything but a desert, offering a fine view of a mirage, a promised land that in its turn would be revealed as desert too

Nobility sat here, and faithfulness, unremitting, unembittered, side by side with bitterness and the desire for vengeance

When this man's persuasive eloquence should have spent itself and those who held slightly different or altogether different conceptions of the best route towards the human commonwealth should have fired the bolts they were busily weighting and polishing, only a fragment of this last evening in town would remain to be got through A touch on her arm, from behind A protruded hand, holding a folded slip of paper Turning, she saw only a stranger, his eyes fixed upon the lecturer

'Are you alone?' I have to catch the nine o'clock slip from Charing Cross Perhaps we might leave together Hypo'

Looking round once more, she discovered him two rows away, already preparing to depart

'I had no business to be there Was at a loose end after Amabel's wedding I'm sending in my resignation'

DIMPLE HILL

'Wise Miriam So am I Retiring from futility'

'Not so much futility as blindness You see them as standing still, marking time I feel they are marching, in increasing battalions, in the wrong direction'

'What are you doing with yourself? Where are you hiding? Like you, I went to that old meeting to fill a spare hour Was groaning under its emptiness, looked up and, behold, Miriam That, you know, was pleasing'

Strange that life's secret shape should select, of all people, Hypo to hear her first outpourings on Quakers and Quakerism Meaningless, for him, the picture she was composing from material brimming in her mind, swiftly, urged by the pressure of the brief moments Yet he seemed to attend

Shutting the door of his compartment, leaning forth, elbows on the lowered window, 'I think,' he said, 'I must come down and have a *look* at your Quakers'

'You wouldn't see them Coming deliberately down, with a prepared spy-glass, you wouldn't see them'

The train was moving Leaning forth, he projected his husky voice '*What* a silly thing to say, Miriam What a *damned* silly thing to say'

'Good-bye!' she cried, and strolled away up the platform, towards the house on the hill brought so near by her talk, and kept near by the evening freshness that had crept even into the enclosed air of this great station Suppose he had come, bringing his poverty to confront their great wealth? It was to his poverty that something in her discourse had appealed Could they teach him, could he learn, do anything more down there than be charmingly interested and appreciative, while his mind worked its swift way to an enclosing formula?

CHAPTER XV

NONE of the summer days, no going forth to discover and explore, had brought so deep a pang of love as this sudden finding, within the moist, cool air, of autumn's first breath, hitherto, through all the years, announcing farewell and the return to imprisonment, greeting her, now, as an intimate, and opening, as she met the assaults of its astringent freshness, new depths within her still incredible freedom

Turning away from the pillar-box in whose keeping lay the record that to-morrow, in her new home—'Of course, Babinka, I realize that the best is Michael's ritual reading, with his silk cap on his head I hear him And you know I begin to think that in ways the Jews, held up, marking time, are still the best Christians Socially, already, they are, amongst themselves, the best the world has'—Amabel would be reading, she looked up towards the woods beyond Dimple Hill, every day of whose slow, rich transformation would be securely her own, and found at her side a halted bicycle Richard, alighting

'Do you know,' she said, aware of his haggard, friendly, lonely eyes upon her as still she looked away down the vista, scanning, to retain her strength, the beloved features of his recovered rival, 'I've just been realizing that the country comes into its own, looks quite different, somehow relieved, when the summer visitors have cleared away'

At once, on his response, ask him the time, pleasantly and casually, and make off

'Ah, yes,' he breathed, unsteadily, still with his eyes on her face Here they were, side by side, with only his bicycle between, alone for the first time since her return, alone with the burden of their mutual knowledge Was he expecting her to look at him while he spoke, and read? Did he not know he was invisible, infinitely far away?

DIMPLE HILL

'I want to get,' she said, and her voice rang clear and hard, 'as far as I can before tea D'you know the time?'

Why was he here? Why coming home so early?

'It won't be much past four yet'

His voice had steadied, but still he stood motionless, gazing down at her He would stand thus, and talk, no matter what sacred undertaking awaited him, for half an hour, with her, with any one

'Then I'll go my best-beloved way and watch the bracken beginning to turn Good-bye'

'You see, Amabel, you picture it all? The three of them, for certainly the old lady will have talked to Rachel Mary as well as to R, having it out during my absence Alfred and the pupil stand outside, unaware and unembarrassed R M will not, I think have talked to R Her embarrassing embarrassment when we are all together means that she has seen R draw back, as she has often seen him do before, but this time with more pain to herself She is saddened, as well as ashamed The old lady, who lives for R alone, I never really liked and, not being a wise woman of the world, have never courted Could not have courted, even if it had occurred to me to attempt an estimate of her power over R Imagine the impressions she collected during my table-talks with Mayne

Imagine the use she made of them in bringing R to his right mind

'I hide my agony, living, when in their company, perpetually on a stage But there are intervals, during our silences, when everything is as it used to be You see, Amabel, there is something we all share and that even for me, who am only at the alphabet, is what makes life worth living, the only real culture, the only one that can grow without fading and carry through to the end But you know this better than I do, and in relation to more people, because you soon run through your personal relationships and want to move on to more people Me, nothing short of dynamite will shift And when I think of the life here going on without me, I wince And they all show me, at every turn, how much, before I go, they want everything to be restored, trying to heal the rupture in advance, even the

PILGRIMAGE

old lady, having got rid of me, tempering her naïve exhibitions of triumph and delight by singling me out, whenever possible, as the object of her flirtatious girlish flattery And R and Rachel Mary by a special kind of niceness, a genuine eagerness to share with me every smallest thing, are actually healing it so perfectly that even while I pine to stay, I pine, in equal measure, to be gone Perhaps to Oberland I've written to Mrs Harcourt, who at once tells me of a fearfully reasonable pension kept by an English ex-schoolmam up above the lake of Geneva She'll be somewhere in the neighbourhood herself, in January Vereker sends, at regular intervals, reminders Found a new place last winter in Austria Kitzbuhel Says it leaves Switzerland in the shade and is known, so far, only to a few'